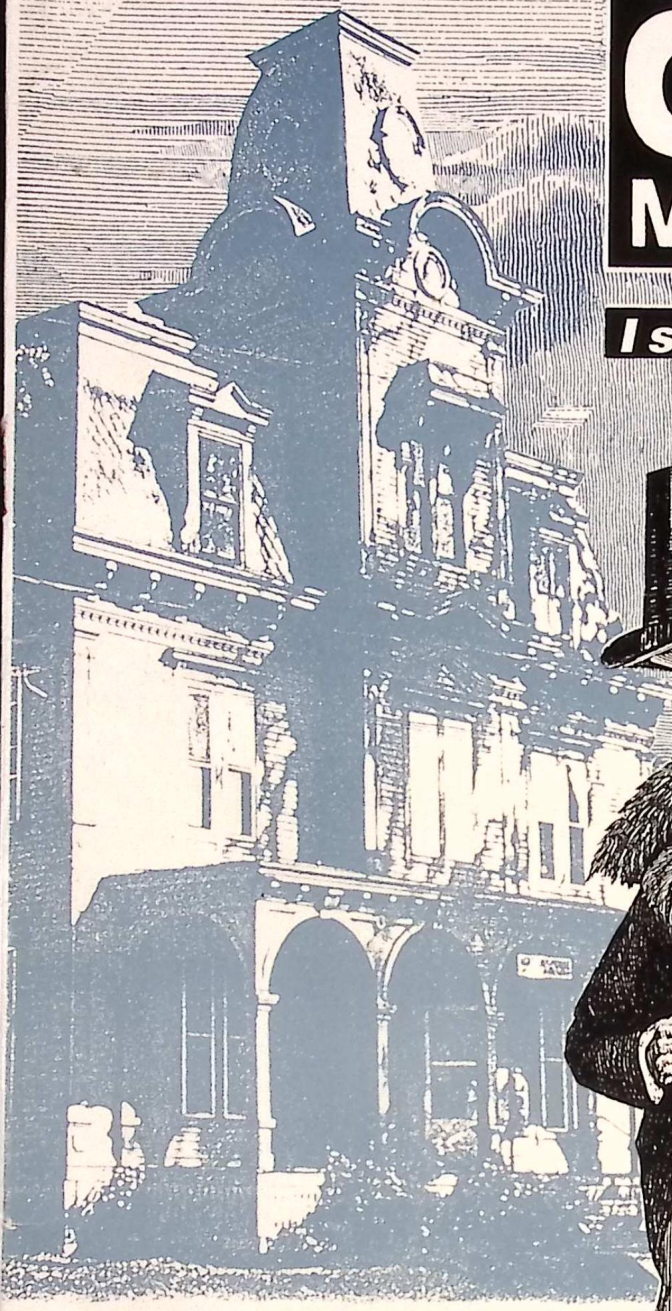
T/SOR/449/132

WEST COAST MAGAZINE

Issue 24 • £1.98



New Work By

Alasdair Gray
excerpt from play

Magi Gibson

Maurice Lindsay

Tessa Ransford

fiction • poetry • reviews • essays

Scotland's Leading Literary Magazine

ISSUE NUMBER TWENTY-FOUR was produced by EM-DEE Productions and printed by Clydeside Press

ISSN 0963-732X

Editorial Address
15 Hope Street
Glasgow G2 6AB

MANAGING EDITOR
Joe Murray
EDITOR
Brian Whittingham
EDITORIAL ASSOCIATE
Kenny MacKenzie
DESIGN
Alan Mason
ADMINISTRATION
Jeanette Dalton
WORD PROCESSING
Ellen Shearer

Free Prize Draw

!!!WINNER!!!

The winner of this issue's free prize draw for our subscribers is:

George Pryde
Bishopbriggs

Copy of ***Coast to Coast*** by Kenneth White and ***a measure*** by Gerry Loose sent
**books courtesy of Open World & Mythic Horse Press*

SUBSCRIBE NOW!
and be included in next issue's draw
There's a form near the back of the magazine

West Coast Magazine receives financial and other support from: **The Scottish Arts Council, EM-DEE Productions, Informa Tech.**
Copyright © remains with the contributors.

The views expressed by the contributors and the reviewers in this publication are their own and not necessarily those of the editor.
Unsolicited material is welcomed. It should be sent to the address above and no other. Submissions sent to us without a SAE will *not* receive a reply. The work should be clearly marked with the author's name and address on each page. Apologies in advance, but sometimes heavy workloads can lead to delays in answering submissions, the usual eight weeks can sometimes be surpassed.
NB Those submitting translated works should note that permission to publish a piece of translated work by different author must be asked from the copyright holder(s). It is the translator's reponsibility to ensure that permission to publish another author's work is received from the copyright holder(s). West Coast Magazine can only act in good faith in matters such as these and shall be indemnified against breach of copyright by the translator.
.Corresponders Note: West Coast Magazine operates a database system. From time to time you may receive mailshots with information on arts, theatre and literary events, or other literary magazines that may be of interest to you. Please let us know in any correspondence if you do not wish your name to be entered on our Data base.

CLUTHA VAULTS SCOTIA BAR

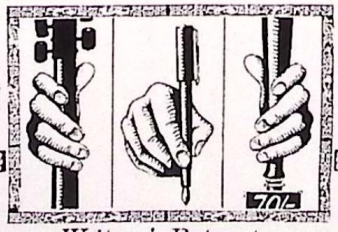
Oldest Pubs In Glasgow

Est. 1814 Glasgow Folk Club Est. 1792

SCOTIA BAR
Folk club every Wednesday evening
Music club every Saturday afternoon
Blues Poets every Sunday afternoon
Regular sessions of music & song:
instruments provided
Scotia Bar publications and recordings on sale at the bar.

CLUTHA VAULTS
Readings and Book Launches most Tuesdays
Performance Prose Poetry Patter
Jive Ass every Thursday evening
Country & Blue Grass every Saturday afternoon
Rollin' Joe & the Jets every Sunday evening
Regular sessions of music & song:
instruments provided
Scotia Bar publications and recordings on sale at the bar.

CONTACT
BRENDAN
McLAUGHLIN
ROBIN KERR



CONTACT
THE REAL
GLASGOW

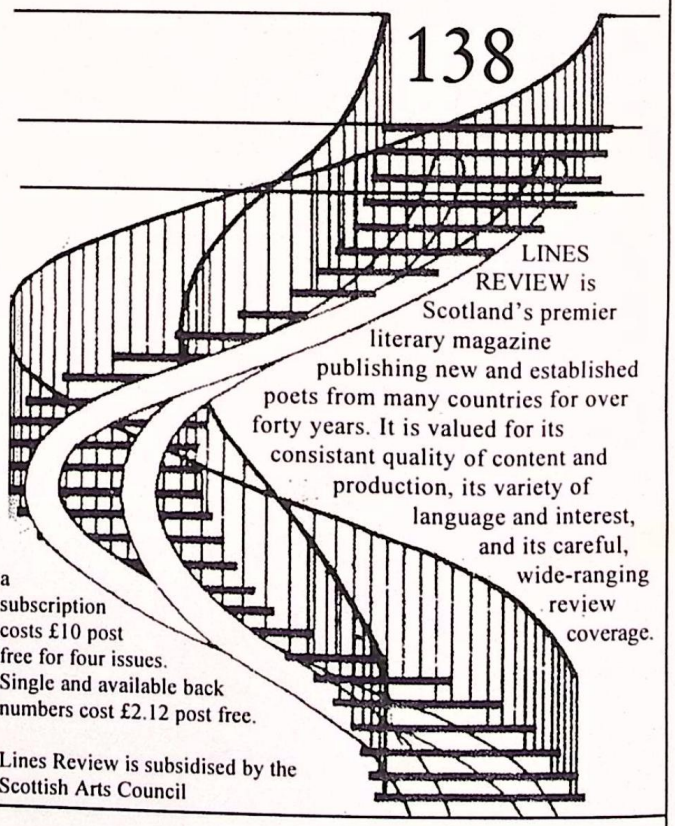
Clutha Vaults
167 Stockwell St.
Glasgow G1 4LW
0141 552 7520

Writers' Retreat
&
Session Howff
PROPRIETORS

Scotia Bar
112 Stockwell St.
Glasgow G1 4LW
0141 552 8681

Brendan & Maureen McLaughlin

LINES REVIEW



LINES REVIEW is Scotland's premier literary magazine publishing new and established poets from many countries for over forty years. It is valued for its consistant quality of content and production, its variety of language and interest, and its careful, wide-ranging review coverage.

a subscription costs £10 post free for four issues.
Single and available back numbers cost £2.12 post free.

Lines Review is subsidised by the Scottish Arts Council

LINES REVIEW
Edgefield Road, Loanhead, Midlothian EH20 9SY, Scotland.

Contents 24

Stories

2 Footnote: Peterhead, Winter 1963 *Iain Grant*
4 A Reekin' Lum *Jonathan Falla*
7 The Pear *Raymond Soltysek*
12 The Seer *David Ross*
32 Paper Tiger *Iain Grant*

Works in progress

20 Working Legs (play extract) *Alasdair Gray*

Essay

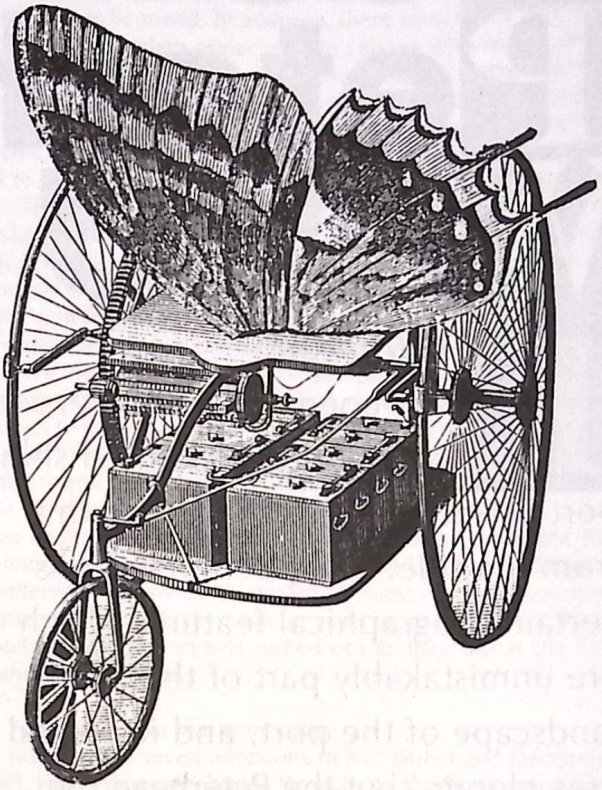
16 Poetry on Display typography as tone of voice *Sharon Cumberland*

Poems

6,15 Tessa Ransford
9 June Walker
10 Magi Gibson
11 Leslie Bensie
12 Gordon Meade
15 Maurice Lindsay
29 Christine McNeil
30,31 A.M. Forster
34 Alexander Hepburn

35 Reviews

40 Crossword



New Book News From ASLS

Full Strength Angels
New Writing Scotland 14
(featuring work from 50 Scottish Writers)

edited by Kathleen Jamie and James Mc Gonigal with Meg Bateman, Gaelic Adviser

Tobacco smoke (full strength) and angels drift in our domestic air. Ghosts and other echoes shift there too. In a year which has seen the passing of two important Scottish poets, it is appropriate that the salutation of poetic friends emerges as a central theme.

The Scottish vision extends to Iceland, Africa, America, Italy - though we carry our cultural baggage with us on the journey. Alcohol and tobacco are the social drugs most obviously available in the duty-free zone and also in this volume.

New Writing Scotland balances new talent with established voices and all the differing energies of dialect, language and gender which give new Scottish writing its excitement and density. Contributors include Iain Crichton Smith, Dilys Rose, Morelle Smith, Gerry Loose, Margaret Elphinstone, Carl MacDougall, Angus MacPhee, Brian McCabe and many more!

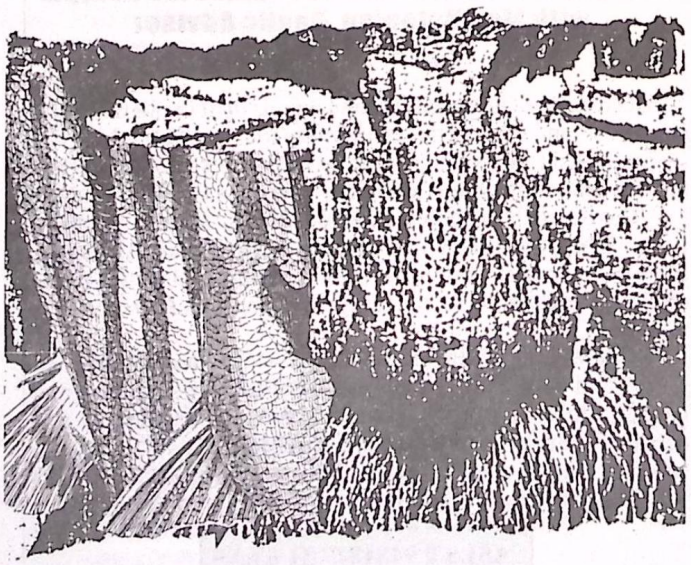
ASLS 0 9484877 31 6 6.95

Available through all good bookshops or direct from ASLS c/o Dept of Scottish History, 9 University Gardens University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QH
☎0141 330 5309

Footnotes: Peterhead, Winter 1963

1. *Peterhead*

The poem is, of course, set in the Aberdeenshire fishing port of Peterhead. You can tell this from the title. The poem mentions certain geographical features which are unmistakably part of the landscape of the port, and its 'cauld grey gloom,' but the Peterhead the poet is talking of is as much a Peterhead of the imagination, a Peterhead of the poet's head, as it were, as it is the Peterhead of the real world. Peterhead is, in this sense, a metaphor.



***Story by:* Iain Grant**

For what, we are not told, though, given the context in which the poem was written, we could reasonably hazard a guess that the poet had misery in mind. The poem, grounded as it is in the depressing reality of the poet's life, represents a wish on the part of the poet to transcend the gloom that is Peterhead. Events in the poet's own life, however, were to prove that what happens in Peterhead can have a considerable bearing on what happens elsewhere. The events alluded to in this poem, indeed the poem itself, were to have tragic and painful consequences for the poet.

2. 'Where the herring swim like fish'

An ironical reference. Herring are, of course, fish, and the poet expects us to know this. In poetry, though, it is usually the case that nothing means what it seems to mean – things are symbols for other things, moods are conveyed by landscape etc – and what Henderson seems to be saying here is, don't over-interpret what I am saying. He was notoriously a man for plain speaking – indeed his propensity for honesty got him into trouble, much of it of a physical nature, on many, many occasions – and his advice to one young poet, repeated on many subsequent occasions, was 'say what you want then shut up, man'.

The idea is repeated three lines later in the couplet *where the seagulls wheel like birds/through the dreary leaden skies.*

3. 'to a half-forgotten, far off land...'

This reinforces the notion that the poem is an attempt to escape the everyday world of Peterhead, and introduces the central theme of nostalgia. Henderson's love affair with Jeanie Shrimpster was, by the time of the writing of *Peterhead, Winter 1963,* deeply troubled, hence the storm and tempest imagery which occurs throughout the poem's 126 lines. It is easy to imagine Henderson, in his army greatcoat and trademark purple trilby, walking along the harbour wall dreaming of better, sunnier days when he and his mistress were happier.

4. fishwife

'Fishwife' was one of the ways Henderson used to refer to Shrimpster. It has two meanings. First, it is a punning reference to Shrimpster's name and her relationship with Henderson. Though the shrimp is actually a mollusc (and Henderson would have known this) it is still a thing for which fishermen (including the fishermen of Peterhead) 'fish'. The 'wife' element of 'fishwife' is an ironical reference to the fact that Shrimpster was not married, to Henderson or to anyone else. The second meaning of 'fishwife' is a reference to Peterhead, fishing port and home of fishwives.

Shrimpster bitterly resented Henderson calling her this, and thought it indicative of his callous disregard for her feelings. It was one of the many bones of contention which made their relationship so troubled.

5. And we, raging did walk,
beside the storm-tossed sea

Another allusion to the state of the Henderson-Shrimpster liaison. The winter of 1963-64 was a particularly bleak time for

the two of them. Shrimpster spent much of that winter in Peterhead tending to her ailing mother, an acute bronchitic whose condition was exacerbated by her fondness for her clay pipe, and Henderson resented having to travel from Edinburgh by train to see her – a journey, in those days, of some eight hours. More bitter complaints were to feature in the contemporaneous poem *Waiting room Waiting Why?* in which he bemoans his fate in having to embark upon these 'long, pointless journeys into argument'. The word 'raging' in this passage is neatly applied to 'we' instead of to the elements, and probably refers to the on-going disagreement between the pair over Henderson's refusal to leave his wife Margaret, and Shrimpster's insistence that, before they could 'forge again that link once made between them', Margaret would have to be 'ditched upon the shining briny/with ne'er a fond farewell', as Henderson puts it in his *The lover's complaint.* The phrase 'storm-tossed sea is a reference to Shakespeare's *The Tempest.*

6. The withered hag who dragged you back/spat venom on my name

Ellen Shrimpster, Jeanie's mother, was not fond of Henderson, whom she thought a dissolute and gloomy wastrel. She was most keen for her daughter to marry the English doctor Alan Richards (the 'foreign quack' of Henderson's *If it practises medicine like a duck,* who sued over the reference) who had courted Jeanie before, and indeed, during her infatuation with the poet. A further reason for Henderson's reluctance to travel up to Peterhead was Ellen's refusal to have him sleep in her house, which meant that his nights there were spent camped out in an outhouse, though Ellen did allow him the use of a primus stove and a hurricane lamp. The privations he endured here, though they may have deepened his already not inconsiderable gloom, gave rise to much fine poetry, including his *Cold, damp December night,* his *To a barking dog,* and his *Hurricane Lamp: Beacon of Light in my stormy soul.*

7. I am forsaken – why? for your foul dam
Her seeming frailty mere sham

Clearly, Henderson bitterly resented the attention he thought Shrimpster was 'squandering' on her mother. Ellen's illnesses had been a regular occurrence every winter since the association between Henderson and Jeanie began in 1949, and Jeanie had felt obliged to make the journey north to look after her on each occasion. Henderson's response was the heartfelt: *You leave me here, bereft, and crying/I would the bitch were really dying.* Shrimpster, in her turn, resented Henderson's resentment. Many of her letters from her mother's house to him in Edinburgh complain that she had no choice. 'I cannot leave her here alone'. More than once, Henderson's reply to this was 'Why not?'

The phrase 'I am forsaken – why? is reminiscent of 'Why hast thou forsaken me?' (John XXV) and is typical of Henderson, who often identified with Christ on the cross.

8. ... in my cups

Henderson's drunkenness was, in his day, legendary, and remains so to this day. It was another cause of friction between him and Shrimpster even though she, too, was not averse to a 'wee dram' every now and again and, usually, again. However, Shrimpster was of the opinion, and with some justification, that Henderson tended to over-indulge and, on these occasions, was rather too prone to becoming, by turns, boisterous, which she found briefly entertaining and then irritating, and maudlin, which she found simply irritating.

Peterhead, if fact, tended to bring out the worst in Henderson. He drank to excess when staying there. 'What else is there to do?' he would complain, 'and besides, I've to keep warm in that blasted shed'. It was in the winter of 1958 that, inebriated, Henderson had fallen from the harbour wall and sustained the skull injury which led to his wearing the trademark purple trilby in later life. He would, on that occasion, have died had he not been rescued by a visiting Orcadian fisherman, Stuart Ibister. The event is commemorated in the second poem in Henderson's *Peterhead, Winter ...* heptalogy, *Peterhead, Winter 1958,* (see above).

9 ... my other friend

Like most drinkers, Henderson had many 'friends' in hotel bars all over Scotland. In addition, there were many people in the cultivated urban upper middle classes who would invite him to dinner, despite the enormous risks of embarrassment this entailed, for the entertainment value of a Henderson in boisterous mood. He would, on these occasions, concoct poems *ad hoc* on a topic suggested by one of the diners. This led to fisticuffs and broken china on more than one occasion.

The phrase *my other friend* here, though, would seem to be a reference to Jane Turner-Cartwright, a London socialite with whom Henderson embarked on a romantic entanglement in the summer of 1961. In the original draft of *Peterhead, Winter 1963,* now in the National Library, this stanza concludes *I often wish this farce would end/and I would drift to the smokey south/ and live there with my other friend.* Henderson was obviously quite smitten by Turner-Cartwright, though clearly not smitten enough to keep these lines in the final version of the poem (or, indeed, to move to London). Nevertheless, the mention of his 'other friend' here, coming, as it does, so soon after a reference to a 'mother-pecked, hovel-dwelling fishwife drudge', is a clear taunt to Shrimpster. She had already expressed her jealousy of the cosy domesticity of the poet's life with Margaret Henderson, and when he started to boast of his liaison with Turner-Cartwright, she became even more distressed. Small wonder, then, that events turned out as they did at the first reading of the poem.

10. the plot I wove that went agley ...

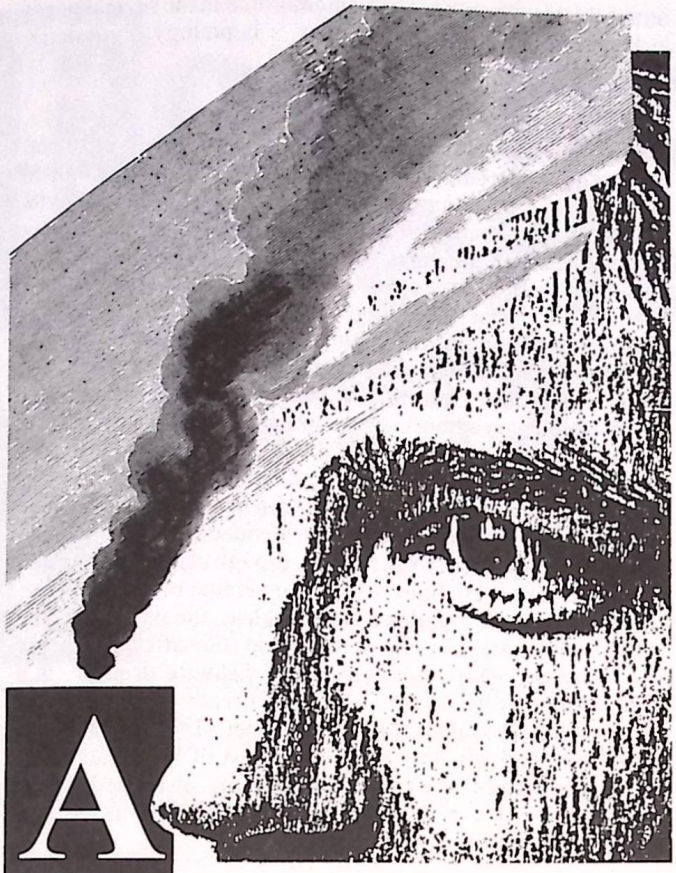
On no less than seven occasions in November and December 1963, Henderson telephoned Dr Alan Richards, disguising his voice (he was an enthusiastic, though not a gifted mimic) and summoned the doctor to attend the supposedly dying Ellen Shrimpster. On an eighth occasion, Richards, Jeanie and Ellen set a trap for him. Shrimpster's version of events is that her mother feigned a bronchitic attack, Shrimpster went to the outhouse to fetch Henderson, brought him into her mother's room and despatched him to telephone the doctor. Richards, by prior arrangement, arrived a few moments later with the constable to find Ellen Shrimpster sitting up in the front room enjoying a hearty supper of smoked herring and scones. Henderson was arrested and summoned before the Sheriff, eventually being fined £20 for causing a nuisance. Henderson's account of the episode is given in *The Ballad of Peterhead Sheriff's Court.*

11. a mounting storm/I saw you seethe

Shrimpster's anger grew throughout that winter. Henderson's drinking; his carping about having to travel north; his crowing about the physical aspects of his relationship with Turner-Cartwright; his occasional liaisons with Annie Spence, a barmaid at the Bon Accord in Aberdeen; his taunting of Ellen Shrimpster and of Dr Richards, all conspired to enrage her. She did not express this anger in words (though if she had, it might be argued, subsequent events may have turned out differently and less violently), but there can be no doubt that Henderson was aware of it, as this phrase attests.

12. as you lamped me with that pot/I saw what misery I'd wrought

At the first reading of *Peterhead, Winter 1963*, in an upstairs room at the Cafe Royal in Edinburgh in March 1964, Shrimpster assaulted Henderson with a skillet, knocking him unconscious and aggravating his previous skull injury. This final couplet was added to the revised version, first published some seven months later, once Henderson, nursed by his wife, was as fully recovered as he ever became.



A Reekin' Lum

A modestly-priced top flat in a modestly polite Leith stair, in a street once the preserve of retired sea captains but now facing an influx of secondhand Saabs. There was a small gentility about the hallways, a profusion of moulded foliage in the cornices. From the lounge window they could see huge raking smokestacks move above the surrounding rooftops: cruise ships berthed three hundred yards away.

Story by: **Jonathan Falla**

The neighbour, an invalided painter of the Forth Bridge, had done over his cornice's plaster vines in green gloss with black for the grapes, and offered his art to McSween and Anna. They declined, opting for peach white and cream hessian curtains for the lounge window that looked towards the water. The old man turned back to his own front door without a word.

"We've hurt his feelings," said Anna.

"He shouldn't pester me," replied McSween, who took everything personally.

The front bedroom was biggest; McSween claimed it for his office, soon to be glittering with fax modems and laser printers that winked and whispered amongst themselves. The newcomers slept at the back in a yellow room that barely held the double bed and a bulging child's wardrobe. It overlooked a cobbled alley.

Anna, even when things were not going well, had the gift of deep sleep. But McSween, that first snowy night, could not throw off the cold, or the adrenaline or coffee. He lay fretting. He realised, the moment the light went off, that they had a hum. He deeply resented hums; he'd triple-glazed his Airdrie flat against a humming transformer in the street. You could never spot a night hum when flat-hunting but, as a light sleeper, he took these things hard. McSween sat up, reached out a bony finger and parted the curtain as though exposing a felon. The culprit was obvious: giant grain silos on the Leith waterfront, floodlit and busy.

He lay back, wondering to whom he could complain. He sat up again, taking a sip from the tumbler of water on the mantelpiece. Once more he lay back, tweaked the duvet close about his neck and silently upbraided Anna for picking this unheated flat. His thoughts went to the fireplace in the chimney breast that cut off a corner of the cramped bedroom, right by his pillows.

The iron was painted black, but was otherwise original. There was a grate still, the chimney closed by a little flap. The surround was prinked out in moulded pilasters and sunflowers, the ensemble completed with a hearth of salmon pink tiles, much crackled. With a coal fire blazing, it might be most attractive. Now it was truly dead, and anyway was only eighteen inches from the corner of the duvet.

McSween tried again for sleep, resolving to forgive those who conspired to frustrate him. He put his bottom against Anna, tucked a clump of duvet between his knees and, for fifteen seconds, he was comfortable. Then his ankles began to quarrel and his shoulder to ache. He shifted, improved nothing, and groaned.

Open-eyed in the darkness, McSween frowned. *Had* he groaned? Or rather, had *he* groaned? A groan there had been, but not his. He was about to blame Anna – but she was comfortable and still, her breath purring. He thought of a door swinging, he thought of burglars loose amongst his modems. But which door? He double-locked everything. No; a groan there had been. And it came again.

It was thin, but not so distant. Muffled, rather. A woman groaning. McSween fumed in the darkness. So, not only a hum: insufferable neighbours also. In Airdrie he'd hammered on walls more than once, and had often gone to the door downstairs.

But the dismal sound did not come from below the floor; rather, it was by his ear. Which compounded the puzzle: next door was only the widowed bridge painter – unless that soggy-lunged bronchitic kept a whore in his cupboard. McSween, wide awake and deeply irritated, strained to hear. He could not make out a word, only this wretched *wailing*. And, at last, McSween located the source. The cries came from the chimney. They must originate from one of the flats below and were funnelled up to him as if through an ear trumpet built into the house, especially designed to destroy his rest.

Then, quite quickly, the sound faded.

McSween subsided, cursing, and had unsettled dreams.

****

Anna walked to work at the Scottish Office. McSween settled to the agreeable task of installing his computers – then heard the rubbish crusher snarling its intermittent way along the slushy street. He scuttled downstairs with two black bags in time to slither after bloody-minded men in blue who of course drove the truck off round the corner just as he appeared.

Re-entering the stair, McSween was struck by a faint scent of woodsmoke. Illegal, in a smokeless zone. And, of course, the smoke would rise to hang about the door of his flat at the top. He was considering complaining, when the groundfloor flat was opened by a young man holding a rubbish sack.

"You've missed it," said McSween, "Unless you run."

"Bugger that," said the neighbour with a mild grin. He was slim and dressed in jeans and a blue-green checked shirt, his hair cropped short and a stud in his earlobe. There was a movement behind him and a similar-looking young man passed from room to room, nodding cheerfully to McSween. Bugger you, thought McSween. The name on the brass plate was Tomlinson – but he'd no idea to which gay boy that applied.

"Is it you burning wood?" he asked.

"The flat's like a fridge" returned the boy, with a disarming smile.

"Really," said McSween, equally frigid.

"We were trying the fire in the back room, but it doesn't draw. Needs sweeping."

"I daresay," replied McSween, and took himself upstairs.

Passing the door on the middle landing, he paused and regarded it. He considered the neatly stripped pine, and a polished brass plate saying *Neville*. A wife-beater? Precious little consideration for the neighbours, anyway. McSween glared at Neville's plate with distaste a moment longer, then retreated to brew himself a tart little coffee with his espresso machine before grappling with the confusion of cables in his new office. The knock on the door came, predictably, just as the steam began to spurt.

"Delivered yesterday," said the bridge painter with a voice like rotting sponge. He handed McSween a padded bag then turned away, saying over his shoulder, "For your business. Whatever that may be."

"Consultancy!" called McSween pertly. The old git was trying to make him feel guilty about the grapes, but would not succeed.

"So what do the other neighbours do?"

"Dinnae ken 'bout the pansies. Middle chappie's awa jes' now." He shuffled on without turning.

'Oh?"

"America, weeks at a time." And he shut the door.

McSween meant to say something to Anna, but couldn't; she already, and quite unjustly, thought him highly-strung. Indeed, she considered all computer consultants neurotic. And what could he say: that a woman who did not live beneath them was keeping him awake? Anna, preoccupied with her new position at the Scottish Office, paid him scant attention all evening. He'd have taken her to task but she went to bed early.

Later, as he stood by the bed pulling off his socks, McSween put out a hand to steady himself and discovered that the chimneybreast was warm. The gay boys had lit their fire again, heating the common stack. For no reason that he could describe, this made him uneasy. He lay on his side in the dark, tense. The world was snow-quiet – and he felt aggrieved in anticipation.

The groans started out muffled but grew inexorably. The same woman, doubtless, but who and where? Someone concealed in a lower flat? Trapped, perhaps? By the gay boys? Or locked into a cupboard in the empty middle floor? If she was in pain why didn't she get help? There was no second voice, no disputant. The groaning was as insistent and selfish as a grizzling baby. McSween felt once again that he'd been singled out, which struck him as outrageous. What the hell was *he* supposed to do about it?

He glared through the darkness at the cold grate. The voice seemed caught behind the little iron chimney flap. He put out a hand, groped and pushed. The flap scrunched back into a century of soot, and heavy flakes fell onto his wrist, wet and oddly disgusting. 'Can't have been swept in decades,' he thought. But the groans continued. The stiller he lay listening, the more they forced themselves upon him.

Then, a quite different sound: a high-pitched squealing! A smoke alarm, downstairs. McSween wondered if the building was ablaze. If so, should he wake Anna? If there was no fire, somebody would get an earful in the morning! He was just raising himself on one elbow – when the alarm cut. He subsided, nerves ajangle.

Neither the alarm nor the woman's cries came again that night. McSween slept poorly, and woke unrefreshed and bitter.

****

"Spot of bother with your chimney?" he asked acidly, on meeting the gay boy going out for milk and papers. The hallway was once more lightly scented with smoke.

"Bloody near asphyxiated ourselves," said Tomlinson (or Tomlinson's lover). "Poked out a great tacky lump of soot."

"I heard your smoke alarm."

"Och, if we cannae clear the shite ourselves, we'll be getting it swept. Ah'm sorry if we woke you."

"You didn't," McSween grimaced wanly.

When the boy had gone in, McSween glanced at the door closing off the stair descending to the basement, and recalled that there was a 'garden flat'. He pulled the sprung door open and looked down. Chill grey light seeped through a barred window in the washhouse passage. There was a green-painted door with a letterbox and nameplate: *Huntly*.

But that was on the wrong side of the building, not directly below. No common chimney there. Huntly was innocent – at least, of groaning.

He looked to the near side. In the gloom, he saw a door that looked like it stayed shut. He glowered: squatters, was it? Or something swinging in a draft. He was about to put a hand to the knob when a powerful impulse stopped him. Caution – or revulsion? He wasn't exactly sure, but he went smartly back upstairs. He went out onto the front step and looked down. There was a basement window – but behind the snow-spattered glass it was blocked with ancient cardboard. He'd not registered this before.

Late morning, sitting with a slug of coffee and discontented with his irritated by inelegant printer cabling (and also fretting that he should have work under way by now), McSween heard his neighbour's door open, followed by shuffles and splashes. The bridge painter was watering his pots and hanging-baskets that cluttered the landing.

"Who lived in the empty basement flat?" asked McSween, poised in his own doorway. The old man glanced at him curiously, the water missing the begonias and his rheumy nose dripping.

"Nobody," he said.

"Somebody must ... "

"Not in a long while. No one'll tak it."

With that, he slithered back into his own hall and shut the door.

This is too much, thought McSween. the fact of the matter was, he was getting no sleep; someone owed him an explanation! Dispirited, he completed his computer set-up, *forced* himself to phone the ingrates at the Agency to say that he was back on-line, then took a bicycle lamp and returned to

the basement. Driven by exasperation, he marched resolutely at the door – which wasn't locked.

The unshaded light surprised him by functioning, in an unwelcoming, 40-wattish manner. It was no longer a habitation, just a dump: two dead bicycles, a 1960s radiogram missing one spindly leg, flower pots, paint tins, a mouldering mattress.

The washhouse and coal cellars also in the basement meant that this flat was smaller than those above: just two rooms, and atrociously cold. The rear had doubled as kitchen and living room. No electric light here, only the iced-up window. There was little to see, anyway, save more flowerpots and garden detritus. McSween, hearing only his own breathing and his shoes scrape on the grit, tried to peer through the window onto the wintry garden, but the rime was impenetrable. The chill took a hold on him. He looked towards the stove in the corner.

It was, yes, that same corner of the building. This was a Victorian cooking range, much larger than his little bedroom fireplace. There was even a rusted pan standing on it. But nothing bore any mark of use within living memory. The soot that caked the surrounds had a unpleasantly greasy quality, thick and glistening in the torchlight. McSween picked up a garden cane from a bundle slumped in a corner. He prodded open the oven, half-wondering if there would be a roast inside. Nothing. He idly stirred the ash in the grate that was coated with grey dust. A little fell through the bars. Amongst this, the lamp's beam caught a small grey object.

McSween crouched, poking the dust aside. His 'find' was a tiny irregular lump less than half an inch long and narrower still. It was hard, some edges sharp, others rounded. He dribbled spit between his thumb and finger, and rubbed. The soot slithered aside, revealing dark brown enamel. It was a tooth.

****

Anna left him that night, to visit her parents in Glasgow. They ate a slimy Indian takeaway without much communication, then she departed for Waverley. McSween considered going to a film but the streets were deep in snow. He opted for a bath, then took a novel to bed with the electric blanket. He was tired, uptight and unhappy. His nerves were so bad that he put on the little radio also, and then could concentrate neither on the broadcast nor the printed page. His eyelids were sagging by 9.30. He dozed, awoke long enough to flick off the bedside light, then slept. He'd left the electric blanket on.

His dream began with the moaning, the woman's groans still emanating from the chimney breast but very clear and close. McSween was in a confined space, a small, stiflingly hot room. The light was unusually orange and swayed nauseatingly – a blazing fire which he was unable to look at. Even a partial turn towards it made his eyes smart. He was working with a firewood hatchet on a wooden block, cutting and chopping at something that was not wood, but both softer and more resistant, rubbery, slippery, with a hard core that crunched under his blows but did not easily part. It frustrated his efforts and he struck harder, sweating profusely, too near the fire and his skin beginning to scorch. A revolting stench filled the room, the awful reek of singed hair. He cut through his material; as one half fell heavily to the floor, he lifted the remainder and blindly thrust it at the fire – only he struck the thick bars of the grate and, when he tried again, hit once more, twice more. In exasperation he narrowed his eyes and made himself glance just momently towards the ferocious blaze.

All hair had gone from the head amongst the flames, and the skin on the forehead was just starting to split. Beneath it, a thin layer of red tissue bubbled, blackened and disintegrated. As the dermis retreated before the heat, it curled and rolled off the bone, leaving skull exposed that charred instantly. But, even as the vomit rose in his throat, McSween saw that the bones were fine, delicately made, that the mouth was small and sensual, and he knew that the face was that of a woman. As the jaw muscles burned, the mouth opened in an awful silent groan. Then both the eyes popped and their contents ran like the pricked yolks of eggs.

****

He woke shivering on the sofa in a sleeping bag. It was late for him, after nine. He'd been roused by a mechanical racket from the stairwell, a powerful motor. Trembling with rage, McSween wobbled from room to room turning on every heater he could find, seized his burgundy dressing gown and opened the front door.

There was activity on the ground floor, cables and rods and men coming and going in orange overalls. As he watched, a smudge of black puffed out through the gay boys' door. He heard a masculine voice: "OK, we'll vacuum that."

The sweeps were astonished when McSween insisted they do the basement flues as well. They remarked that they'd never met such sticky, disgusting soot. The stairwell needed mopping afterwards. McSween, though he complained like hell, felt convinced that this somehow put an end to the business, an end to absurd dreams. Until, towards nightfall, he put a hand in his jacket pocket and found a tooth.

Poem by: Tessa Ransford

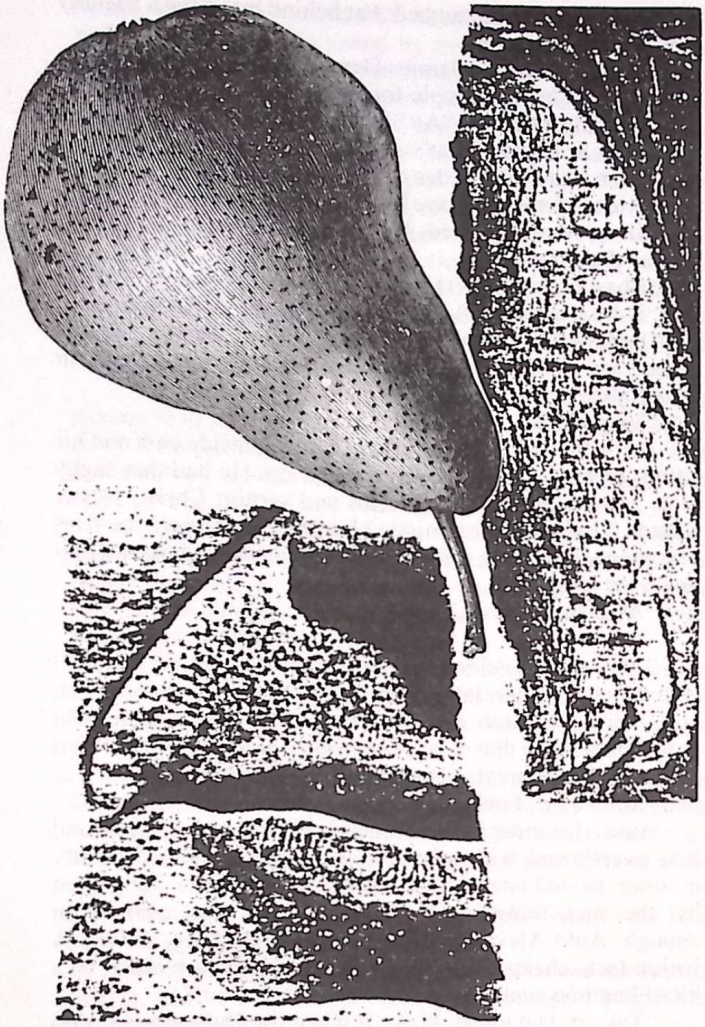
Meditation

I sit beside Lord Buddha in the plane.
He keeps his balanced pose
upright, and can sleep there,
hands in the lotus position,
eyes, never entirely shut
or entirely open.
Sometimes, very quietly,
he smokes a cigarette.

We travel side by side
through nights and days
and over arctic mountains,
seas and plains,
a lantern on the wingtip and
another on the tail, marking
the circle of this meditation space.

I endure my aching body
eyes shut or open, the light on or off,
while Lord Buddha sits serene and
seems to gather strength
like mossy stones.

Continue now, and breathe a little longer:
there will be ripples in the lake:
it is a waterfall – a waterlily.



The Pear

The old woman was dressed in grey. Grey apron and headscarf. Grey knittit stockings that crumpled between the bottom of her grey skirt and the top of her grey boots. Even her skin was grey, furrowed and dusty and parched field coloured.

Story by: **Raymond Soltysek**

Jamie watched her from the corner of the street, peering round the edge of the clinic wall. She dragged the sacks to the front of a ramshackle old table which served as her stall. Four sacks: apples, pears, carrots, potatoes. Whit would the prices be this week? – you could never tell, though it wasn't as bad as abroad. Businessmen were jumping aff the Empire State building in America, and in Europe, ordinary working men like his faither were being paid suitcases of money by the day and it still wisnae enough to buy a bag of sugar. It was better here, the newspapers said.

The old woman didnae see him. He enjoyed that feeling, of seeing but not being seen. He often spied through lightit windows at night, at children straining to dae homework by the gaslight, at fathers asleep in front of the fire, work boots propped against the armchair legs. Most of all, he watched the mothers, bent over sowing or darning, their fingers working steadily, automatically, like machines of levers. Their dresses and blouses fluttered open and closed, open and closed: he felt the curve and heaviness of their breasts, the warm milkiness of their smell, and ached down below. He'd go home and lie awake, feverish and fretful, for hours, rescuing the milky mothers fae Eric Campbell and oncoming trains, and he got worried about how his penis went big and hard.

The old woman filled three small wicker baskets with produce and placed them on the table. She leaned back, her hands on her hips. A lassie, fifteen going on sixteen, pedalled up on a bike, swung onto the kerb and jumped off. Her granddaughter. She helped at the stall every second Friday. Billy Campbell in his class fancied her, but big Gerard Connolly said she was his, he'd had her round the back of the Town Hall. She was plump and dark haired and Jamie imagined her older.

Across the street, Davie Conroy and two other boys from the year ahead watched from the cobler's doorway. Pat appeared behind him, jabbed him in the sides. Jamie pretended to be surprised.

"Gotcha," he said.

"Aye, so ye did. Eejit."

"Awright. whit's goin oan?"

"The vultures ur gatherin." Jamie nodded over to Davie's group. "Any minute now."

"Whit's she goat this week?"

"Aipples, pears, carrots, tatties. Ah fancy a pear."

Within a few minutes, three other boys had turned up. They would all have to be getting to school soon, so it was time to move. As if on a signal, they thrust out into the street, whistling and sauntering and joking like Jack Buchanans.

"How's it gaun, auld yin?" shouted Pat.

"Aye boays, no bad. Whit can Ah dae fur ye?"

They crowded around the stall, all except one of the older boys who sidled up to the girl and laughed with her and touched her thigh. The boys Oohed and Aahed at the fruit and vegetables, fingering them with their left hands while their rights, pushed to the bottom of their jackets through the unpicked stitching of the pockets, reached out and nabbed what they could.

"Well boays, no a bad spread this week, eh?" Cannae afford nuthin though," said Pat.

Jamie tried to push and jostle his way to the front, but the other boys were bigger by a way. He squeezed through and filched a single pear before it all broke up.

"Sorry, missus. Ma da's goat his books."

"Aye, mine an aw."

The old woman commiserated: times were hard. Still, mebbe their mothers could afford a wee bit later. Aye, mebbe, the boys agreed.

They strolled off around the corner, then hollered and pelted away down Mortimer Street toward the school, ducking round a tram and sticking their tongues out at the passengers. They compared their loot: the old woman was ten apples, twelve pears, three carrots and a potato worse off. No-one could understand Jimmy McGuire's passion for raw root vegetable. Davie reckoned he was a tink and said so.

"Bugger off," Jimmy said, and heaved up green spit to launch at his feet.

They made it to school with five minutes to spare, though Auld Alexander was already on the steps at the boys' entrance, blackboard pointer rigid behind his back, whistle clamped in his teeth. The boys gathered in the far corner of the playground, over the wall from the girls' toilet block, to hide from him, and the one who distracted the granddaughter was given half an apple and a pear as a reward. Some ate their pickings, juice dribbling down their chins. Jamie shoved his pear into his inside breast pocket, saving it for his supper. Or mebbe he could sell it.

Auld Alexander swung the handbell to call the boys into lines. They stood regimented at the foot of the stairs and peered up at him. After morning prayer – God make us working class scum subservient wee bastards for another day – Auld Alexander held up his hand for attention.

"Boys. I have an announcement to make. Today, the area is to be graced with the presence of the Duke of Kent, who will be performing some public duties in the area. Perhaps you may have read about his visit in the newspaper."

No one spoke. No one coughed – Auld Alexander hated coughing, said it was a symptom of tuberculosis and therefore of bad breeding.

"Well. Perhaps some of you have never encountered newspapers. Am I right, Conroy?"

Davie jerked up. "Yessir. That's right sir. Ma da disnae get wan."

"Which is why you speak like a guttersnipe, Conroy." Auld Alexander twitched with disgust. "The Lord Provost – a personal friend – has told me that the route the Duke will take through the town will bring him past our corner of Mortimer Street. He has asked us to cheer the Duke past, and I have agreed. It is a great honour. We will therefore adjourn to Mortimer Street at nine forty-five, where we will gather on the left side of the street. The staff will supervise you. On the right hand side of the street, girls from the Mary Street Academy will form their own welcoming committee. I needn't remind you that there will be no fraternisation: remember, boys, these are young ladies. We will return at ten fifteen."

There were several long, slow, quiet intakes of breath. The girls from Mary Street Academy. Girls from posh homes who wore uniforms and had legs and breasts. Girls who pushed their noses in the air when scabby boys like them were around. Girls who came to school in their fathers' motor cars. Their own female schoolmates were shadowy wee creatures who only shared class space with them and who never spoke, and if you got close tae them they sometimes smelt of urine. And the boys would have thirty minutes across the street fae the girls fae the Academy: they would be able to poke their tongues out, wink and admire them. It wis a dream come true.

Bryant, their teacher, was young and liberal: he beltit only five or six boys a week. They should have done Maths, but Bryant spent the first hour of the morning talking about the visit. He was a republican, he said. Do not be confused, boys, Royalty is not as important for social cohesion as you are led to believe.

"Kings are not born: they are made by artificial hallucination. So says George Bernard Shaw."

Jamie chewed his pencil: Bryant looked right at him.

"Of course, Jamie, your father was in the union at the engine sheds, wasn't he? He must have strong views on the monarchy."

Jamie raised himself. "No noo, sur. He used tae say the monarchy wur parasites." He shook his head. "But no noo."

"Why ever not, Jamie?" He had that aren't-you-glad-you've-got-something-in-common-with-the-likes-of-me look. Bastard. "I always thought he was a man of principle."

"He goat laid aff fur huvin a meetin. Noo ma maw cries him a parasite. He said he wis staunin up fur democracy so she skelpt him."

Most of the class laughed: Pat behind him gave a friendly punch on the shoulder.

"Ah. Democracy, Jamie. Democracy simply means the people thrashing the people for the people." He paused to let the importance sink in. "As Shaw says."

"Naw he disnae. That's shite."

There was a single, dangerous second of silence. Course, Auld Alexander would have killed him, grabbed him and stuck him till he bled and died, but Bryant wisnae that type. He wisnae that strong.

"I beg your pardon, Davidson? What did you say?"

"It wisnae Shaw. An' that's no whit he said oanywey. It wis Oscar Wilde. Ma Maw reads aw his stuff tae me. He said democracy's the bludgeoning o the people by the people fur the people."

"Very clever, Jamie. Very clever."

Jamie looked up at him, He had a Kelvinside chin and his accent pretended to come from there too. He had that saggy look of someone always greetin and girnin: Christ, Buster Keaton. That's who he reminded Jamie of. And he wisnae feart of someone who hung affa town clocks and shoved custard pies down his long johns.

"Aye sir. Sorry sir."

"You will be."

Then, from outside the door, Auld Alexander's handbell called them to order. Jamie kept his head down on the way out, but it didn't matter: he felt the respect around him, that untouchable aura that meant everyone was looking at him and thinking he was great, a Daniel amongst the lions, and he was buoyed up by it. Fuck Bryant. It was worth it.

Auld Alexander stood at the swing exit doors: a pail behind him overflowed with stick things, and Carmichael, spotty monitor, passed one to Auld Alexander each time a boy went by, the stick thing handed over. Jamie's turn came soon enough: Auld Alexander held out the stick thing. A flag. A Union Jack, cheap cloth, the colours run into each other, on a bit of bamboo cane.

"Take it, Davidson. Wave it when the Duke passes. You never know, he might look at you."

Look at you? Whit did that mean? Did it mean the Duke was a miraculous bastard and in his presence, Jamie Davidson esquire, thirteen, nae joab when he left next year, nae chance wi lassies fae the Mary Street Academy, a faither wi nae joab, would suddenly and miraculously be cured of his shitey existence? If you went doon Mortimer Street a wee way, would ye perchance find yersel in fucking Damascus? Still, Auld Alexander wisnae the type tae take lightly. "Thank you, sir," he said, smiling as insincerely as he could.

They doubled up, two-by-two, and silently filed down the road to Mortimer Street, Jamie aware of some jostling amongst the boys to walk near to him. Auld Alexander and Bryant lined them up neatly, like a school photograph, bigger boys to the back, shelpits like Jamie at the front. Across the street, the Mary Street girls looked over, willowy brown-blazered starlets who examined them as if they were encountering wildlife escaped from the zoo. Davie Conroy managed to thumb his nose at them.

Auld Alexander stood in the road and raised a hand, though the boys knew better than to make a sound. "Boys. The Duke's procession will be here in approximately seven minutes. On my signal, you will raise your Union Jacks and wave them. I do not wish you to cheer: such displays are vulgar, and I am sure that some of you would take advantage of the anonymity to behave inappropriately. Therefore, I expect silence and eyes front. Is that clear?" There was a general mumbling, like a drone from the distant steel works. "Good, boys. Now enjoy the occasion: you will remember this day for as long as you live."

A calm descended on the groups. Every boy stared across the cobbles at the Mary Street girls, and every one of the Mary Street girls looked back with such disinterest it withered their

hearts. Then a roar turned their heads and a BSA motorcycle wobbled into view, followed by two black cars. Jamie was disappointed: he'd half thought he might get his first sight ever of a Bugatti, or even a Hispano Suiza, but English royalty preferred to drive around in Austins. Miserable lot. Auld Alexander flapped about in the middle of the road, ready to give instructions. Jamie looked back at the Mary Street girls.

They were all in left profile, all except one. An older girl, taller then most, at the back. Jamie couldn't really tell what she looked like – they were all in identical uniform, their hair tied up and crammed into brown hats. But her face was different, older, sharper, and as Auld Alexander shouted "Now boys, wave your flags," she gently shook her head, staring Jamie straight in the eyes and coaxing him on.

He held the stick down. Auld Alexander scurried onto the pavement to be the first to see the Duke. Around him, bits of cloth fluttered and rustled, the sound of wind in his ears. Jamie's hung around his shin. The girl watched him, smiling and coaxing, smiling and coaxing.

Bryant stood at the opposite side of the group, looking down the road along the front of the boys. "Davidson!" he called. Jamie swung round. "Wave your flag, boy. Wave your flag." Jamie shrugged and scratched an itch on his calf. "Wave your flag boy. Don't be defiant."

The girl could tell what was happening. She gave Jamie the slightest nod and he let the cane slip from his fingers. The flag balanced momentarily on its tip, then slowly toppled into the gutter.

Then Bryant flew past Jamie, smirking like a bastard, and tapped Auld Alexander on the arm. Snitch. Auld Alexander seemed confused momentarily, looked down the street to see how near the procession was, then pushed past Bryant, gown flapping.

"Davidson. What's the meaning of this? Wave your flag, boy, the Duke is almost here."

Jamie felt his jaw push out slightly, like he had nae control over it, and he scuffed his feet. Auld Alexander practically jumpt up and doon.

"Davidson! The Duke! The Duke, boy!"

"Fuck the Duke. Fuck yersel an aw."

It lookt as if Auld Alexander's face was gonnae explode. The other boys stopped waving. "Keep those flags going, boys! Or there'll be hell to pay!"

Nervously, they began again. And in amongst all the flapping and dancing pennants, Jamie saw the pointer raised. Auld Alexander brought it down across Jamie's chest: he doubled over, and was caught by the nape of the neck and swung around. The pointer smacked him hard across the buttocks, again, again, again, again. Jeesus, it wis sore, it was fucking agony, he felt his insides swell up and the world was pushing out of his arsehole, the wood thwacking hard against bone, Auld Alexander screaming, "Davidson! Davidson!" at the top of his voice.

And yet there wis a dim pleasure, a sensation of bringing to life those down below bits he was told to never touch, that and the knowledge of whit it must look like tae the fucking Duke, this wee band of merry boys waving thur flags and in the middle this demented auld bastard battering the living daylights out of one of the loyal subjects of the realm. Clap that chappie in the Tower! Christ, it wis almost funny.

The procession passed: the other boys still waved their flags, terrified tae stop. Bryant the Republican hero hud fucking legged it. Auld Alexander hudnae seen the Duke after all. He whirled Jamie round: there wis sweat on his top lip and he wis breathing heavily. The pointer wis still raised: he looked like a fisherman about tae cast.

"Davidson. Davidson," he whispered. Then he moved aside, mair stooped and aulder than ever.

The girls from Mary Street had averted their eyes, heads together, twittering and gossiping. The girl in the back row leaned out over them, craning her neck like a swan over those in front of her, looking down the street at the disappearing rear of the Duke's Austin. She had missed it. Or ignored it. Or chose to let him think that.

There was no kudos on the way back to school, no sign that he had taken on the system and won. If anything, his classmates edged away from him, as if he had some disease. The disease of being caught. He walked reasonably well, though his backside felt as if it had been tattooed with strips of hot candlewax and he had to splay his legs out a bit to ease the pressure of his trouser legs on his skin.

Along Mortimer Street, the trees dappled light onto the cobbles, making each one seem perfect in its roundness, its texture. Jamie breathed in. Usually, some factory could be tasted on the air, but he only smelt cleanness and aliveness. Fuck, he ached and ached but he'd been turned on, like a wireless set, glowing and receptive and red, red hot. He loved it.

The classroom was subdued. "Get your Mathematics books out," said Bryant. He avoided Jamie's gaze, in fact he avoided looking at the whole class, jist goat his nose stuck in the book and startit reciting questions and answers that they wur supposed tae follow. Jamie snaked his jacket off and shoved it under his bum as a cushion on the hard wooden bench. The pain eased slightly, but a lump in his pocket bumped against his knee.

He fished in: the pear. He examined it under the desk. One single gash, from Auld Alexander's first swipe across his chest, cut the skin. The white flesh oozed. He ran his fingers over the curves of the pear, it's smoothness, the rough little bump of the base, the little wrinkled nipple at the stalk. The flesh was flecked with creamy freckles, tiny, tiny flakes suspended in the fruit. Already, the edges of the slash were turning mushy brown.

He slid the pear into his desk. Let it rot. The weal on it would moulder, decay, the whole thing would stink and split. His weals would heal. And he didn't give a shit about the girls from the Mary Street Academy or Bryant or Auld Alexander.

Oscar Wilde? Fuck aye.

Poem by: June Walker

Hemlock

Head and shoulders above the rat's umbrellas
beside the canal, taller than dock plants,
flourishes hemlock, poisoner, sister to
laburnum and foxglove.
We may not know it as the killer of Socrates
(who played the fool, once too often)
but all Scots children learn that this big smelly plant
is 'dug's flourish' – dogs pee on it,
so we don't gather it to fill our posies
of wild flowers. We pick hawthorn or gowan instead.

Runaway

She wakes beside a man
with greying stubble on his chin.

She notes how the muscles on the arm
hauled heavily across her breasts
feel no longer young, no longer firm
how on his neck the thin pale flesh
crinkles like crepe.

She calculates his age
as if he was a tree
she'd sliced through
and could count the rings.

Old enough to be her dad –
that makes her smile,
snuggle closer.

She shuts her eyes, scratches
her cunt. Her sharp nails scrape
his dried cum from her thighs.

The bed is warm –
a sheltered lair
she has burrowed into.

It smells of him,
of sweat, of stale cologne
of last night's beer,
of big strong daddy bear.

In the scullery she finds
cereal, milk, a bowl

turns the radio on
eats slowly, lights a fag

combs her long blonde hair
makes herself at home.

Poems by: Magi Gibson

we interrupt . . .

the newsreader hands us over live
to the town, to the street where the
bomb went off and the live reporter sticks
his mike under the nose of a live eye-witness –
and the eye-witness still wondering shy
he has survived shuts his eyes and says
there were people everywhere,
people, children
everywhere

but this is radio and the mike
is hungry and it waits like
a red-throated chick for
raw, wriggling words
so the reporter prompts, in a
professional/ a confessional/
a do-tell-us-more sort of way

and the eyewitness opens his eyes
and says again in a small dry voice
there were people, people everywhere

and somewhere in the distance
a siren screams
an old man moans
a woman cries
a child dies

while at my kitchen sink
I peel one potato
then another and another
and fill a pot with water

who will mourn the black crows?

The Irish poet mourns the murder
of the songbirds of his land

but who will mourn the black crows
dangling by the farmer's gate
killed by the farmer's hand?

Who will miss the crawking song
that kept us from our sleep
or long to see them
black against the dawn
ripping binbags wide
or picking out the eyes
of stricken sheep?

Yet as I pass the twisted forms
down by the farmer's gate
I tell my little children lies

no, not birds, my darling ones –
only black umbrellas
broken by the wind and rain

only old black gloves,
my turtle doves,
hung to dry in the midday sun

Poor ugly unloved creatures –
only the snell winds will mourn you
only the leaden skies will weep

and so I make this vow – when
the sun sinks low I'll creep
across the silent roads
across the farmer's fields
across the whispering streams

and under a skull-white moon
I will untie the farmer's twine
and watch your souls fly high
into a starry sky of black crow dreams

Poems by: Lesley Benzie

Safe Areas
The united nations
irrevocably kept on
keepin the peace
while fae ahind an infrareid lens
in the negociated safety
we glimpsed their pain
as they buried mair deid
afore complete darkness descended
aneath the blanket a war
they slept
nae kennin
which dreamers wid wake
in the mornin

Some Things Smell
At 13 she worked in the fish
trawlin doon the cobbled street
ti the arches under the railway line
efter school time n at weekends
she earned the means
ti wear the latest trends n make-up
masked er youth
so it wis niver hard ti fool the bouncers
fan she passed them by
at the pubs n clubs
far she flirted wi maturity
unable ti imagine ony ither wy ti escape
the limitations
reflected in a rogue fish scale
stickin ti er erm
seen under the flashin lights
the dancin queen dreamed the night awa
till in the mornin
she wished she wid disappear
as fast as the air a sofistication
got thick wi the smell a fish
n the gaffers breath
as it filled the day
till gan hame time
then it slowly filled the van
fan it emptied o a the ither quines
leavin er ti be entertained

The gaffer came on heavy
advancin
ees personal theories
on er growin unease
while the fish-hoose granda
provided light relief
fan ee offered ti tak er hame
ti hae a look
at ees bonnie black satin sheets

Gulls
She, who was born
On the wing, crashed, fell,
And now wing-clipped,
Cannot soar.

He, faithful convert,
Full of clouds and foam, riding
The thermals, finds it
Impossible to land.

Should she feather
Him back to the nest,
Or should he reintroduce
Her to the flock?

Wind
She met a man
Who was scared of the wind.

As it blew through him,
He zipped up his family.

As it scattered his atoms,
He tried to collect his thoughts.

And when it had transported his very being,
He had already pinned himself on God.

She who knew the cyclone,
Knew this man's hollowness.

She who knew the whirlwind,
Knew his particles of dust.

And she who knew the tornado,
Knew his too easily detachable soul.

The Fall
He fell, and from that moment on,
After the rearrangement of his splintered images,
He worried about nothing.

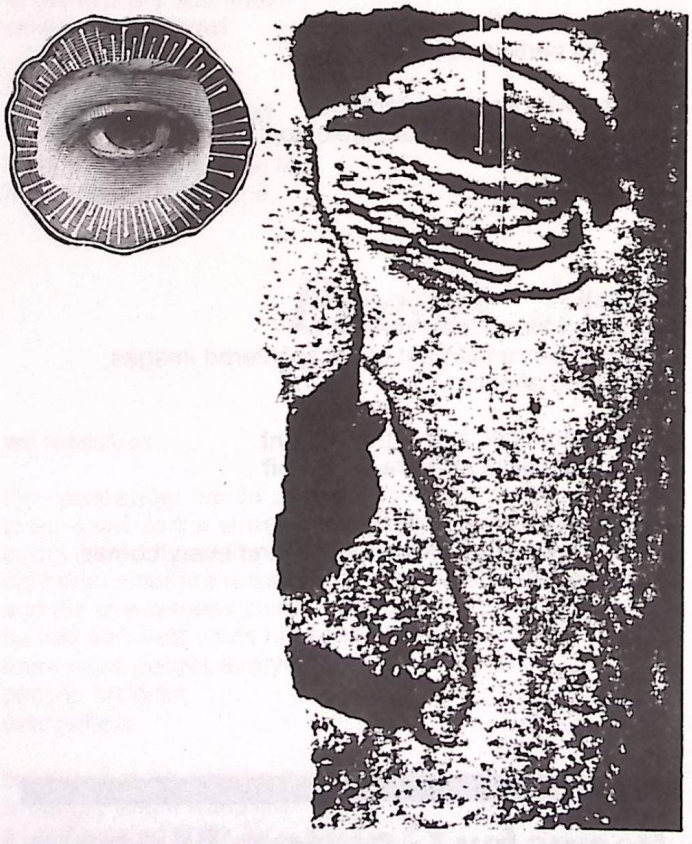
She saw him fall, and in that instant,
The lids of her eyes were ripped off.

Too attentive, eyes ever open,
She sits watching, waiting, and round every corner
Death comes.

Poems by: Gordon Meade

The Seer

At a first glance, his slowness might well be put down to old age, what with John that far on in his years, but it was no more than his own particular way of paying heed to what he was doing. However much time was left to him yet in his retirement, he could afford to let it pass a shade slower than the rest of it had gone in, and the little that needed doing these days still got done.



Story by: **David Ross**

The breakfast dishes were washed and back in the cupboard, and the animals wouldn't need fed until later on, so he got the ladders down from their hooks in the garage rafters, ready for a couple of small jobs that had been waiting on the milder weather.

Aye, it was mild enough out that Monday morning, unusually mild for the first week in March, with a warming wind in over the hills from the west. And from the looks of it, the rain would surely hold off long enough for him to get the windows cleaned first of all. Soon the ladders had been propped up against the top sill, but then John stopped all of a sudden, as if some warning scent had caught in his nostrils. That was always the way it would start to come over him, and when John Mackenzie smelt something of that nature in the air, the years had long since taught him neither to worry it nor to ignore it.

Instead of climbing the ladders then, he walked down the garden path and stood with his back to the gate, searching his surroundings for anything that would be a mirror to the sober mood he found himself in. Around his feet there were yellow wedges starting to push the buds open on the daffodils, and the snowdrops and the crocuses were well on for the time of year. In the far corner of the garden there was even a faint haze of pink on the cherry tree – but the animals that had gathered by the back fence behind it were looking in a different direction.

Once he'd shifted his head into line with their own, John's gaze soon settled on a greyish patch of sky above what could be seen of the brooding waters of Loch Eye, and there he had the mirror he'd been looking for. So it would no doubt have been several minutes he stood there, watching what was due to happen later on that day, before he pulled the tweed bonnet back into its proper place, with the brim at a slight tilt to the line of his forehead, and slowly walked back into the house.

Anyone would think a rare commotion like John had witnessed could hardly be forgotten again just like that – unless it was his memory starting to go. But according to himself, that's more often than not been the way of it with the second sight, ever since it was granted him, and that's going back almost fifty years to a young loon in his twenties. All he was left with then, sitting in the kitchen over a cup of tea and his pipe, was a certain tiredness that slowly drifted away along with the last of the smoke from the briar.

Meanwhile the planes would have started their dive-bombing practise over the Mhorrich, a few miles to the north, sending the thunder of scorched air echoing round the whole peninsula, but John was as used to it by now as anyone else in the area. In fact the background noise was normal enough for him to pay it little heed when he got up again to fill the bucket with warm water, drop a sponge in it, and jam a folded newspaper in his pocket.

One by one he cleaned all the top windows until there was only the one with the gull's mess on it left to do. By then the planes would have been away again, back off to Kinloss more than likely, or else to Lossiemouth, and in the long silence they left behind them, John began to feel someone standing at the foot of the ladders.

'Mr Mackenzie?'

"Aye,' John didn't need to turn his head round to know he'd taken an instinctive dislike to the man waiting on him down below, stranger though the man was. But he kept himself civil. 'I'll be with you directly,' he finished wiping the glass dry with the last ball of newspaper, while a single reconnaissance plane, out to take photos of the practise target, sent a distant boom through the air and was gone again. And right enough, by the time he'd climbed back down the steps with the bucket, he was in fact more than civil. 'I think they have been learning their technique from the aeroplanes,' he started washing out the dirty sponge with a slow humour.

The stranger looked puzzled. Then the penny dropped: 'Ah, you mean the seagulls.'

With a vague nod of the head, John went around picking up the wet gobs of paper he'd dropped on the path, hardly

surprised to have found his visitor looking much the way he'd pictured him. The dark blue cord trousers and the matching waterproof anorak were just the sort of neutral clothes the man would choose to make his appearance, for he would be a sceptic, bent on testing John's powers by giving him no outward clue to his identity.

On that score however, the stranger had been less than successful. Aye, the clothes fitted the man well enough, yet the man did not altogether fit the clothes: he would look more at home in his city suit. That would make far more sense of the close-cropped brown hair and the beard – a professional beard if ever John had set eyes on one. And the receding hairline, with the odd fleck of grey in it, would probably place the stranger in his early forties, more or less what he'd reckoned when he first heard the voice. All that aside though, it was the narrow blue eyes, and what more than likely lay behind them, that kept John in mind of his first feelings about the man. 'And you'll be?'

'Richard.' The man had a certain strength in his own grip too, though it would never be a match for John's, even if he lived that long. 'Richard Britten.'

'You'll come inside, Mr Britten,' John led the way with the bucket, emptying it in the sink and putting it by before he filled the kettle. The man's hand had been slightly damp to the touch, but it was hardly unusual for people to be a bit on edge when they came to visit. There would even be some secret part of the sceptical Richard Britten that believed there was really something in it – the second sight, that is to say. Otherwise he would hardly have made the journey. 'You've not come by the road,' John had noticed the polished shoes and the cuffs of the cord trousers had fresh mud on them.

'No. I took a farm track and then walked round by the lake – the lock, rather.'

'Lock Eye,' John nodded.

'It's very scenic.'

'In its season ... ' John fetched two cups and saucers out the cupboard.

Now he'd been invited into the house, the stranger was even more eager to make a good impression, and that was normal enough too. Folks always seemed to think their personal manner would affect what John saw in the future, as if that had ever made a blind jot of difference: now there was *real* superstition for you. 'I found a very restful spot by the water,' Richard was still busy trying to be pleasant while John filled the pot. 'Before the planes arrived at any rate. Practising, presumably?'

'Aye, they have a target out there on the Mhorrich, on the far side of the loch,' John fitted the lid on the pot and covered it with the knitted cosy. Then, for the first time, pity got the better of his dislike for Richard Britten when he looked directly into the narrow blue eyes and saw the closeness of the man's death. 'Thon spot by the water,' John found himself asking, he wasn't sure why, 'would you be able to point it out to me?'

The man donned his puzzled look again, but he followed John back out the door and down to the garden gate. 'Over that way,' he duly pointed to the east. 'A little further to the right I think, just beyond that clump of trees.'

'And you would say you felt at home there?'

'I don't quite understand – '

'It's a simple question, mun. Would you say you felt at home there?'

'Well – yes.' Richard's politeness was becoming strained. 'What on earth is so important about the place?'

John slowly shook his head. 'I'm trying to mind,' he scanned the landscape, but it wouldn't come back to him. And when the next wave of planes broke the silence, he was still standing there and it still wouldn't come back to him. 'I must beg your pardon, Mr Britten,' he put a sympathetic hand on his visitor's shoulder. 'We'd best go in and have our tea before it gets cold.'

The stranger's eye, on the lookout by now for some explanation for the old man's odd behaviour, would no doubt conclude in passing that he was a widower, watching him pour out the tea. And that would certainly be correct so far as it went. But an eye with a longer experience of John would be aware that his awkwardness in doing women's work around the house was a consequence of trying to do it someone else's way, and that trying to do things someone else's way was John's own quiet way of keeping the memory of his wife alive. 'Will you have a biscuit with it, Mr Britten?' he'd be slowly working the round top free on the tin, the way Mrs Mackenzie used to do.

'I'll have a cigarette instead if you don't mind.'

'Aye, mun. Have your smoke by all means,' John pressed the airtight lid closed again and tapped out the pipe in the metal pocket he'd made to fit below the rayburn door. 'I'll join you myself in a minute,' he rested the briar back in the ashtray and loosened the pulley rope.

Richard Britten had noticed the things hanging from a bar of the pulley on their separate bits of string, about half a dozen of them, the size and shape of black puddings wrapped in dirty looking bandages, and now he was to find out what they were. Once John had untied one from the centre rung, where it had been drying out over the winter, and cut the tight cotton bindings open, there it was: a long lump of tobacco, solid as a half pound of Walnut Plug, and dark as the rum that had soaked through the cured leaves from last year's plants. 'I wouldn't have thought you could grow tobacco this far north,' Richard voiced a polite interest in the proceedings.

'There's many a thing can be done if you've a mind to,' John would be cutting off a small pile of flakes with the penknife, then rubbing it up between his thumb and forefinger.

'You have a greenhouse then?'

"No. This is out the garden,' John filled the pipe and tamped it down with the blackened matchbox after he'd put a light to it. 'It's a guy coorse smoke mind you,' the humour was back in his eye, with the blue smoke filling the room like the waves of the sea. 'And now, Mr Britten, is there something I can do for you?'

As far as Richard was concerned, things weren't going quite according to plan. The way he'd seen it beforehand, he'd pay whatever price – within reason – was demanded for the consultation, and then leave, either enlightened, or, far more likely, duped by a charlatan. But such was his faith in the power of money, it had never crossed his mind until now that his request might actually be refused. Under the circumstances, a direct and businesslike approach seemed to be the best ploy. 'I'd like to pay you for a consultation. I've been told you can see into the future.'

'And who would be telling you that?' John can be as fly as a fox when the mood takes him.

'A friend,' Richard decided to come right out with it and name the person. Time was marching on after all. 'You told him he'd go to the States and be very successful. You were absolutely right.'

'I don't mind on that part of it,' John puffed away on the pipe. 'I mind the man himself though. A great love of geology in him. Off he had us on an outing to Hugh Miller's cottage over there on the Black Isle, and then it was down to Rockfield for a look at the raised beach –'

'I'm afraid you have him mixed up with someone else. My friend's a physicist –'

'A physicist, aye,' John frowned, 'for his living. But were you not telling me he's a friend of yours? You seem to know remarkably little about the man.'

'Perhaps I should have said an acquaintance – a former colleague.'

'Aye, perhaps,' the frown was on John's face still. Then he was quiet a while, staring off into space. 'And perhaps you'll be pleased to know your acquaintance is in good spirits in his new home across the water.'

It was the first time a smile had crossed the stranger's face, even if it was a smile of pure derision. 'Are you trying to tell me –'

'I think, Mr Britten,' John was scarcely able to hide his annoyance with the man, 'I would be ill advised to tell you anything beyond what mainly interests you: yourself. And to that end you will perhaps be kind enough to lend me the green fountain pen you keep in your inside pocket.'

'How the devil –'

'I have no truck with the devil, Mr Britten,' John could see he'd given the stranger a fair turn there. 'If you still wish me to tell you what I see, you will simply lend me the pen.'

Out of the inside pocket in the anorak came the pen anyway, and John sat holding it in his free hand a long time, till the pipe was done. From what the stranger had to say for himself afterwards, the old man's eyes seemed to be looking through him and past him at the same time, and the cat had got his tongue again, with not a single word coming out of him.

It was his sense of smell though that John was paying heed to while he had the pen in his hand. First of all the vague scent of linoleum polish came off it, putting him in mind of the long, soulless corridors he could see his visitor walking through. Then came the ranker smell of the man's ruthless ambition, and right enough, John could see him finally ensconced in the office he coveted so much. Yet for all the outward similarity of features, the man in the grand office was no longer recognisable as the same man that sat before him, and once again John could see how near his visitor was to his death.

It took a while longer before he tried to put it into plain words the stranger might understand. 'You are a man of science, Mr Britten. That will hardly be news to you,' John gave him back the pen at last. 'And if your science has brought fear into the world along with its many marvels, you consider that is no concern of yours. For you are a man near consumed by ambition. and I do not speak of ambition for the world, Mr Britten, that it might be a better place for folks to live in, but with ambition of the narrowest kind that sees no more in a person than his usefulness to you – or the lack of it. Aye mun, small wonder you want to know what the future holds so you can take a rest from your perpetual scheming –'

'I –'

'Hear me out, Richard Britten,' John went on with hardly a pause. 'You have not come here to converse with me about modern physics, and so much the better for that no doubt. If you cannot even believe your own science when it tells you there is more than one future, you will easily discredit anything John Mackenzie has to say. But I say to you now that a man with the very likeness of you, down to the last hair in his beard, will indeed become the head of your department.'

John watched the brief spark of pleasure flash in the blue eyes. It was as if he'd finally struck the flint behind them. 'And I must tell you also that a man with the very likeness of the one that sits before me, a mean-spirited man whose word has rarely been worth the breath it took to utter, will die this same day.'

It's hard to say exactly how long the two of them would have sat there looking at each other, with Richard feeling all of a sudden as tired as John must have done. And though they both recall it being a long silence, there would surely have been the occasional cackling of the geese and the hens outside the window as well as the drone of the planes coming in from the north, even if neither of them had an ear for it.

Anyway, it was Richard Britten made the first move when he looked at his watch and it came as some surprise to him to find it was that late on. 'Goodbye, Mr Mackenzie,' says he, back to his old polite self again seemingly, telling John he had his lunch booked in the Fearn hotel – but what still passed for politeness was now little more than a curb on his anger.

'And will you be going back to your hotel by the same way you came, Mr Britten?'

The truth of the matter was that Richard had an overwhelming urge to get out of the old man's company with no further ado and back down to the banks of Loch Eye where he'd stopped on his way to visit the seer. He was still quite shaken by what John had had to say, and he needed somewhere safe where he could have a private think to himself. In fact he was already on his way to the door. 'It would be quicker than walking round by the main road,' he stated the obvious.

'It would that,' John got up out his own chair. But though he still couldn't mind on why, he knew he had to keep the stranger from leaving yet. 'You might recall that the matter of payment was mentioned.'

That stopped Richard right enough, if not for long by the looks of it. Taking his hand off the door, he pulled the wallet out his hip pocket with a speed that put John in mind of someone drawing a pistol. 'And exactly how much do you consider I owe you for the privilege of listening to all that mumbo-jumbo, not to mention your downright rudeness/'

'If there's money burning that much of a hole in your pocket, there are those more in need of it than myself,' John had the frown back on his face even if he kept his voice as meek as a lamb's. 'I have another small job to do yet the day and I'd merely appreciate your assistance with it.'

'I prefer to pay you in cash, Mr Mackenzie,' Richard was fingering the notes impatiently. 'I've already told you I don't want to be late for lunch and I have to drive back down south this afternoon.'

'I believe it was yourself that first made any mention of payment,' John was thrawn. 'And I had taken you for a man of your word.'

It was a difficult decision for the stranger to make, particularly when he didn't realise his life depended on it. He'd hardly developed any great liking for the seer, and he'd even calculated that with no phone in the house, nor any cottages within shouting distance, there was little John could do to stop him leaving, with or without making payment of any kind. So to this day Richard Britten still doesn't know what made him decide to stay. 'Provided it doesn't take too long,' he gave way in the end, still hoping he'd have a little time left to stop by the loch before getting back to the hotel.

'We will be as quick as we can,' John slowly led the way back outside, where the ladders were still propped up against the front wall.

'Would you be kind enough to take them down and bring them into the garage, Mr Britten,' John went on ahead to open the bare wooden door of the outhouse built on to the gable. Once it would have been a garage right enough, but John now evidently used it for a workshop, and, from the looks and the smell of it, for a stable and a henhouse as well., 'It's a case of replacing the broken pane in thon skylight,' he showed Richard where the ladders should be placed inside the garage, with the top ends of the shafts wedged between two of the sloping rafters.

'I'd be much obliged if you could bring the whole window down for me,' John held the foot of the steps while his assistant went up them. 'As you'll see, Mr Britten, it's a metal casement and there will be a fair weight in it. If you open the window about ninety degrees, you should be able to slide it free of the hinge. Aye, that's the very dab, Mr Britten. Canny does it on the way down,' he was soon helping Richard with it on to the bench. 'I'm much obliged to you.'

'Right. You're very welcome I'm sure. Goodbye, Mr Mackenzie.'

'I had been hoping,' John knew he still had to detain the man a while yet, 'that you'd also be kind enough to take the window back up the steps for me after I've put the new pane in.'

'And then that's it? I have your word on that?'

'Absolutely, Mr Britten. You've already been extremely generous with your time,' John began knocking the broken glass out the frame with the hammer, while Richard looked on impatiently. 'The job might go a little quicker if you could roll me out some fresh putty,' the seer pointed out the plastic tub sitting on the bench. Then he set to chipping the remains of the old, brittle stuff off the astragals, and sweeping it away in the bin along with the fragments of glass.'

By the time he got round to cleaning the rust off the metal frame with the wire brush, Richard hadn't so much as taken the

top off the tub, for his fury at being manipulated by this crazy old man was reaching its peak. A powerful part of him was still dying to run out the garage and down to that spot on the banks of Lock Eye before it was too late –

But too late for what?

Slowly and mysteriously, all Richard's anger vanished into thin air, and he found himself standing there content as a child, rolling out the lengths of putty and lining them up on the bench until John said there were enough. And indeed Richard started to feel as privileged as a child to be helping the old man with the thick, snowy hair and the white moustache, lightly stained in amber above the lip from the smoking of his tobacco and the occasional drink of whisky. Working the tools that had seen him through most of a lifetime, John's body moved to such a simple, honest music – the firm scratch of the cutter marking the glass and the satisfied snap of a clean break – it was a music Richard wanted to learn.

'If you will just have a little more patience with me, Mr Britten, I'll have it done in no time now,' John got on with the job while his visitor wandered off through some straw to the back door in the garage and looked out on the small piece of land where a few hens, two geese, a goat and an old pony made an odd assortment of animals. 'They were not wanted – except for the hens of course,' John didn't look up from his work of placing the pane in the soft putty and cleaning off the surplus with the chisel. 'They come in now and again when the weather gets dreich,' he turned the frame over and pressed in more of the strips Richard had rolled, setting the chisel at a steady angle to finish off the job.

'It's too late now.'

'Too late for what, Mr Britten?'

'Was I talking out loud? I don't know. I really don't know.'

'I'm awful sorry, mun. I can't mind either,' John could feel a genuine affection for the stranger now in all his confusion, for it was a confusion John himself still shared. 'That's the animals late for their lunch as well as ourselves,' he made light of it while his visitor carried the heavy window up the ladder, trying not to get his hands in the wet putty before it was back in place.

All Richard's hurry to be gone had disappeared along with his anger, and after he was down again, he folded up the steps and parked them neatly on the garage floor before he followed John out. 'All the windows cleaned and repaired, Mr Mackenzie,' he heard himself saying, 'and still we see through a glass darkly ...'

'You might well put it that way, Mr Britten," John closed the garage door behind them. 'But I do appreciate your assistance and I need detain you no longer.'

Richard smiled a wry smile. 'To be perfectly honest, I have to admit you've given me quite a lot to think about ...' he was still reluctant to be off, but John seemed not to have heard him as he led the way down to the garden gate, then turned round to wait on him.

By that time, Richard had almost got used to the noise of the planes himself, even if the latest roar sounded closer than any so far, and his inner ear told him there was also something very different about it. What he actually noticed first of all though was the same expression gathering on the seer's face that he'd had not long ago when he asked for the fountain pen. It all seemed to focus on the widening of the nostrils as he stood there watching the huddle of animals at the fence behind the cherry tree. Then his head began nodding slowly up and down as he turned in the same direction they were looking and gazed into the murky eastern sky. 'I mind now,' he seemed to be talking only to himself. 'I mind now all right –'

'That plane's going to crash,' Richard suddenly realised.

'Aye, Mr Britten. Observe where it comes down.'

Above Loch Eye, the bright unfolding of a parachute caught Richard's eye a moment before he had his last glimpse of the plane heading for the very spot where he might so easily have been siting. Then came an end to the painful whine of the engine in a bang that set the whole of Fearn village shaking.

Poem by: Tessa Ransford

Metaphysics

This birth is a planetary affair
since nothing worldly is a fraction worth
this present incarnation upon earth
and into our safe-keeping now and here.

His mother, weakened by her valiant strength
in labour, now shall never lose or lack
the love he needs; his cries, his very breath
of steady life her food, as she gives suck.

Weak is with strong alternately translated
from love to love in love by love created.

Poem by: Maurice Lindsay

An Elegy

A launch holds briskly out from the loch shore,
arrowing ripples. From a slowed-down turn,
a woman at the prow leans out to pour
ashes out of a silver funeral urn,
then, white and red, throws after, heads of roses
that float upon the patch of greyish rust;
hunched in the frozen posture grief imposes,
head bowed before the thinned dispersing dust.
Snorting, the boat churns up its normal pace
and chugs back where it started from, its wake
rocking the roses as a foam of lace
widens a trailing V astern, to take
roses and dust, so late the cause of weeping
into the water's wide anonymous keeping.

Poetry on Display: Typography as Tone of Voice

A trip to the fiction section of the bookstore shows that there is no limit to the graphic ingenuity of book covers to entice you to pick up a novel, but inside most volumes of fiction the pages look alike – blocks of type from page to page unrelieved by visual interest. The reason for this seems simple enough – on the outside of a book the type is used as a device to attract attention, while on the inside, the reader doesn't want to be distracted from the content of the text by the medium of its transmission. In fact, the range of typefaces which are available for extended bodies of text is relatively small, compared to the almost unlimited range of "display faces" used for short headings, titles, and book covers.

Essay by: **Sharon Cumberland**

Sutton and Bartram [*Typefaces for Books*] articulate the prevailing wisdom in the typesetting profession: "While display faces can be extrovert, colourful and rich in character, book faces must be transparent, allowing the reader to hear the author's voice without distortion or interference."

This respect on the part of typographers for the author's voice extends to the realization that any typeface at all will give the text a "tone of voice". This is where the book typographer's task lies. He or she "must invent an accent, a tone, and decide on the volume: should he whisper or shout or sing?" In other words, "Type is an emotional matter. The typographer's choice establishes the tone of the text because in spite of the limited range of available faces, variations in these faces are legion – each type specimen offers variations in letterspacing, point size, italic, bold, small capitals and other variable. Therefore the "sound" of the author's voice changes – sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically – depending on the face and font (variation of a face) in which the text is set. And yet once the mood of the text is established through the choice of font, the author no longer has control over the subliminal tone of her text for the duration of the book.

Given the importance of tone to solid blocks to prose text, how much more important is the use of type and its subliminal tone to poetry – a genre which admits a myriad of different techniques for placing words on a white field – many more strategies for word placement than in prose. And while it is inappropriate and probably impossible to make useful generalizations about poetry, the relationship between the poet and the word is something other than a transparent stream that is desirable for prose. A poem needs to be read slowly: the words must inhibit the eye rather than accelerate its progress over the page.

I find it curious, therefore, that the same two principles seen at work in the fiction section of the bookstore – elaborate display faces on the covers of books with look-alike pages inside – holds true in the poetry section. With few exceptions, poems are published in the same typeface from the beginning of a volume to the end, without regard to the shift in subject, tone, feeling or for the need to stop the eye rather than to hurry it forward. And for literary journals or anthologies, the same principle encases multiple authors – with all their differences – into the same typographical tone of voice. My inquiry into the subject of typography in poetry suggests to me that the very smoothness and readability of the typographer's art works against the ability of the poem to communicate. Yet few poets have regarded the subject of typography as central to their art, though many have looked upon the field of the page as something other than a linear word-stream. I would like to conduct a short tour of some poets and poetical movements that have rejected the transparency of what we might call "prose typography".

Shaped poetry, such as George Herbert's [1593-1633] "The Altar," made a conscious effort to resist the headlong motion of single type by slowing the eye with a representational form of the subject as opposed to strictly academic form of the poem. Nevertheless, whenever this poem is reproduced, it is printed in whichever type the particular editor of the particular text or anthology chooses to use. You may not see a significant difference between this version (from the Norton Anthology) and the second version (from the Norton Critical Edition) but there are distinct differences in the elegance of the font, the white space between words, and the leading (leading being the space between lines) which cause the tone of voice in the first example to be more tranquil and more modern than in the second version. In other words, the tone of voice conveyed by the type is considered for the anthology, but not for the individual works within the anthology.

William Blake [1757-1827] was one of the first poets to reject the dictated tone of voice of a single typeface. Not only did he engrave his poems in script with illustrations, but he used water colors to illuminate every page in an array of

pastels. In the preface to *Milton,* Blake's great prophetic poem, it is as if the words of the prophet had set the page on fire and the black script is written in ashes. We have become so familiar with Blake's famous introduction – his "bow of burning gold," and his "chariots of fire" that we forget – unless we see it on his own glowing field – that although these are images, they are not really metaphors. A reproduction of the poem in black on white in single type – no matter how beautifully or intelligently done – reduces the text to comparisons, whereas on the iridescent page we see the inscribing hand of the prophet and know the chariot to a real one into which he has been caught up – even as Ezekiel was caught up into the wheels of fire – and has been transformed in order to proclaim his message.

Another more recent poet-ancestor I would like to cite as one who rejected single-type for his poetry is Apollinaire who was influenced by Picasso's cubism. Cubism was a method for showing multiple sides of a subject simultaneously by fragmenting the figure and showing all of its surfaces on the picture plane. Adapting this idea to poetry, Apollinaire devised a form which expressed "simultaneity" – the ability to be conscious of multiple events at once – by fragmenting language and arranging it into facets on the page plane, imitating not only shapes of objects but also imitating states of mind with suggested forms. In "Lettre-Ocean", for example, the circular shapes are compared variously to the sun, gramophone records, radio wave transmitters on the Eiffel Tower and the expanding consciousness of the twentieth century. As in overlapping conversation in a cafe, or the multiple impressions registered on the mind in any given moment, the calligrammatic form reflects multiple rather than single images. Apollinaire also made a distinct advance in the use of typography in poetry by recognizing the tone of voice not only in font usage but in printer's symbols, the small sized graphics used historically for emphasis, beautification, and the manipulation of the reader's attention. In "Lettre-Ocean" Apollinaire uses no fewer than eighteen different fonts in addition to the I-bar and wave ornaments.

Unlike Blake and Herbert's poems, Apollinaire's calligrammes are not reproduced in typefaces different from those which he himself first selected – even the English translation strives to reproduce the fonts of the originals. Apollinaire is not the first poet to introduce the concept of poetry that must be reproduced in what we today would call "camera ready copy" (poems in which the publisher must accept not only the poet's words but the poet's selection and arrangement of type) – Mallarme was the forerunner of the visual movement – but Appolinaire worked closely with compositors to achieve his effects, and was fortunate to have a committed publisher in *Les Soiree de Paris.*

Another school of poetry which rejected single type, "Concrete" poetry, developed in the 1950s and 60s is really an amalgam of various particular poets and their schools of thought – Marinetti and Futurism, Pierre Garnier and the Spatialism, Isou and Letterism, Lemaitre and Hypergraphics. Movements in the art world – Cubism, Dada and Surrealism – overlap, influence and invade concrete poetry so that the mechanical, concrete object – the printer's type in all its forms – gained a significance beyond the previous understanding of it as a vehicle into which meaning is poured or from which meaning is shaped and transmitted. It takes on independent graphic significance. In the variety of examples that follow, poets employ type in ways that leave out conventional usages, creating a new relationship with the content of the text itself.

When Peter Finch was writing his introduction to *Typewriter Poems* in 1972 he could truthfully make the claim that "in this age all poets use typewriters" – but in 1996 the only poets using typewriters are those with computer anxiety and those who have discovered the mechanical capabilities of the patten and keys which cannot be transferred to the computer printer. A series of poems such as Peter Mayer's "the yin yang cube" (Fig. 1) if done on a computer graphics program, would

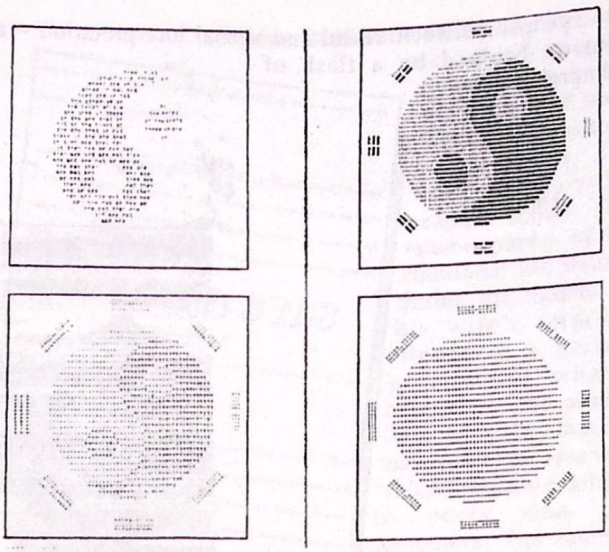
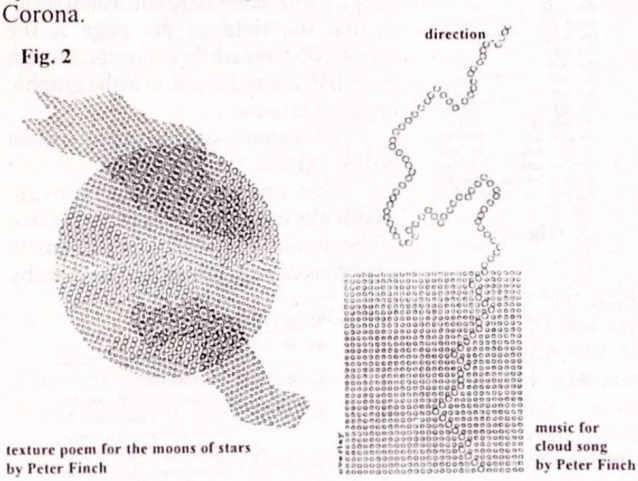


Fig. 1. from: the Yin Yang cube by Peter Mayer

lose all the ragged and painstaking qualities of the row-counted figures and the re-inserted page which must have involved the folding of the page to fit the points diagonally into the patten. The hand-wrought quality of the work renders the poem itself into an artifact of an earlier time, and yet it's a medium in which the type itself conveys the presence of the poet – calligraphy alone contains the same immediacy of the poet's hand on the text. Furthermore, there is an inimitable style of typewriter poem characterized by Peter Finch's visual images (Fig. 2) in which the synaps is the regularity of the line absent of textual content, molded into apparent fluidity by overlayed figures. Close examination of these forms reveal the underlying rigidity of the machine type coaxed into organic forms, which conjures up counter-culture images – back to the land and the Smith-Corona.

Fig. 2



texture poem for the moons of stars
by Peter Finch

music for
cloud song
by Peter Finch

More aggressive in the use of typography to disturb the page plane are poems that pose problems to and for the reader in a deliberate effort to slow the eye and engage the mind on the level of the word, letter or symbol rather than on the level of the thought stream. One such problem poem is John Furnival's "The Fall of the Tower of Babel" (Fig. 3), which appears to be a picture-poem in a similar style to Finch's texture poems, but which, upon closer examination, reveals the urn-shaped tower as a weighty construction of words and phrases about peace for the world and various expressions of greeting – fragmented by diagonal straight lines at the top. Words, in this poem, take on the quality of brush-strokes, transferring to the architecture a lively surface containing textual significance. The energy transferred to the surface of this poem by its unconventional tooling of type and its use of sans-serif and cyrilic faces forces open

the synapse between visual and verbal interpretation – a tension bridged by a flash of comprehension.

Fig. 3

John Furnival:
The Fall of the Tower of Babel (1964)

is the text the text left out
is the tex he text left out
is the te e text left out
is the t text left out
is the text left out
is the ext left out
is th xt left out
is t t left out
is left out
is left out
i eft out
ft out
t t out
th out
the out
the ut
the t t
the te
the tex t
the text xt
the text ext
the text t text
the text te text
the text tef e text
the text left he text
the text left the text
the text left o the text
the text left ou s the text
the text left out is the text

(Fig. 4)

Claus Bremer's poem entitled "the text left out" (Fig. 4) uses type to stake out a space which, the concluding line informs us, "is the text." We are to read the type and disregard what we read, though, paradoxically, it is the type which creates the message – the blank text. this poem is related to William Blake's iridescent field and ashen script in that the field of the page is the message bearer while the script, though essential, is amplification to the graphic image it creates.

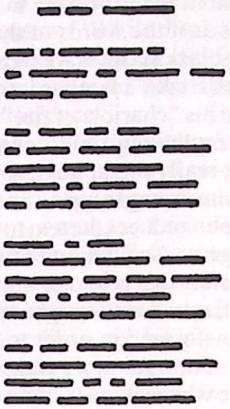
The printer's symbol in Mary Ellen Solt's "Moon Shot Sonnet" is in fact the sight marker used to indicate landmarks in photographs of the surface of the moon. The sonnet form is easily deciphered and the point is thereby made that technology has robbed the moon of its' mystery and romance. Her further point – that concrete poems have difficulty finding "valid new forms" – is not as inherent to the poem, but arguably present. Nevertheless, with this poem the mind is intrigued, the eye is stopped.

(Fig. 5)

Mary Ellen Solt, "Moon Shot Sonnet"
"It has not been possible since the Renaissance to write a convincing sonnet on the moon. Looking at the moon photographs in The New York Times, it occurred to me that since the scientist's symbols for marking off areas on the moon's surface were presented five to a line and the lines could be added up to fourteen, a visual sonnet could be made of them. The poem is intended as a spoof of an outmoded form of poetry and as a statement of the problem of the concrete poet's search for valid new forms." (*M.E.S.*)
Designed by John Furnival, first printed in Poor.Old.Tired.Horse.

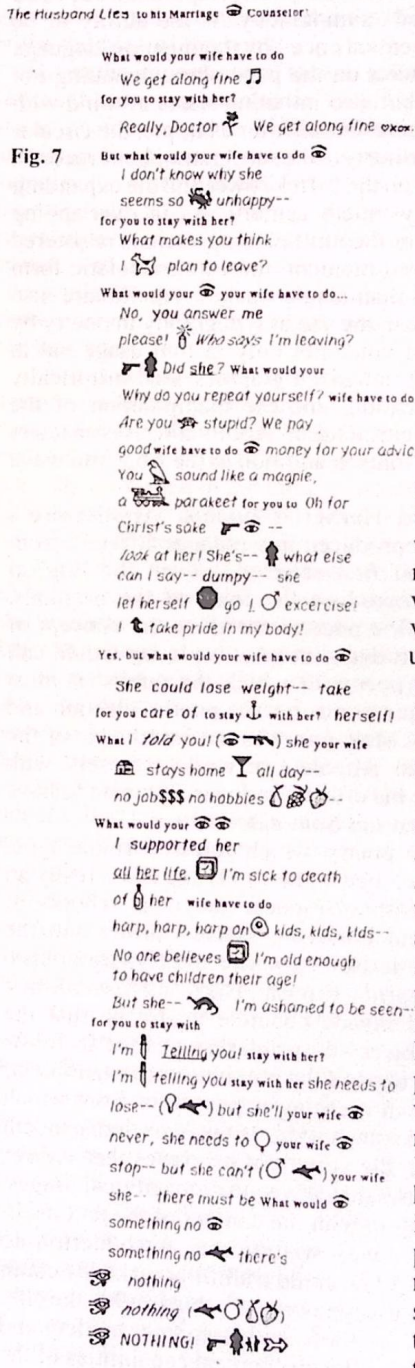
I find this poem more engaging than Man Ray's problem poem (Fig. 6) because Solt's poem has a meaning for the reader to parse. The absence of meaning is undoubtedly the whole point of Man Ray's indecipherable poem, which is a problem poem without a solution. for those of us old enough to know of the existence of an ancient form called Morse Code, however, the mind is teased into thinking that meaning may be present in a pattern of dots and dits. But it's not.

Fig. 6
Man Ray
1924



A final example of a problem poem which incorporates a range of the issues discussed is an experiment of my own, "The Husband **Lies** to his Marriage Counselor". this poem incorporates a range of fonts and symbols using in particular the Macintosh symbol-faces "Cairo" and "Mobile', intended for interior designers, landscape architects, CAD (Computer Assisted Design) engineers, advertisers and various other print professionals.

Fig. 7


The Husband Lies to his Marriage Counselor
What would your wife have to do
We get along fine
for you to stay with her?
Really, Doctor We get along fine
But what would your wife have to do
I don't know why she
seems so unhappy--
for you to stay with her?
What makes you think
I plan to leave?
What would your your wife have to do...
No, you answer me
please! Who says I'm leaving?
Did she? What would your
Why do you repeat yourself? wife have to do
Are you stupid? We pay
good wife have to do money for your advice
You sound like a magpie,
a parakeet for you to Oh for
Christ's sake --
look at her! She's-- what else
can I say-- dumpy-- she
let herself go I excercise!
I take pride in my body!
Yes, but what would your wife have to do
She could lose weight-- take
for you care of to stay with her? herself!
What I told you! ( ) she your wife
stays home all day--
no job$$$ no hobbies --
What would your
I supported her
all her life. I'm sick to death
of her wife have to do
harp, harp, harp on kids, kids, kids--
No one believes I'm old enough
to have children their age!
But she-- I'm ashamed to be seen--
for you to stay with
I'm Telling you! stay with her?
I'm telling you stay with her she needs to
lose-- ( ) but she'll your wife
never, she needs to your wife
stop-- but she can't ( ) your wife
she-- there must be What would
something no
something no there's
nothing
nothing ( )
NOTHING!

However, typefaces and symbols seem to me to be a resource for expressing non-verbal content or emotional subtexts in poetry. My objective is to use typefaces to indicate different voices (internal or external), so that conversation becomes available within the frame of the poem without forcing me to enjamb the lines by voice. The symbols incorporated into the poem are intended to flash non-verbal messages to the reader – messages which may reinforce the verbal message or undermine it. This ubiquitous advertising technique is not much in evidence in poetry to my knowledge.

The chance – operational poetry of Jackson Mac Low and John Cage – poetry which is visual insofar as it crosses into the field of temporal performance – has influenced the work of Hannah Weiner, a psychic for whom variations in type are meant to approximate language she sees hovering in the air. This is literally visual poetry, though the reproduction in type is still conventional in that it does not engage typography beyond the sound emphasis available in font variations. This style of work is related to Language poetry, which is characterized, in the

words of Linda Reinfield, as that which attempts to "resist both the definition of content and the invisibility of form, and it does this by making it impossible for readers to ignore the material, the structures, and the contextuality of writing." In its preoccupation with the material, Language poetry is descended from Apollinaire, whereas its challenge to conventions of meaning is more related to Dada.

The two samples of Language poetry I have here are of Susan Howe and Joan Retallack. In this example from Susan Howe's "Thorow" (Fig. 8) the type is scattered in ways that defy the logic of print and force the reader to manipulate the book itself – turning it in all directions – in order to read the text. The text, however, suggests an almost archeological texturing of a place – layers of history and natural phenomena stratified in words rather than in soil.

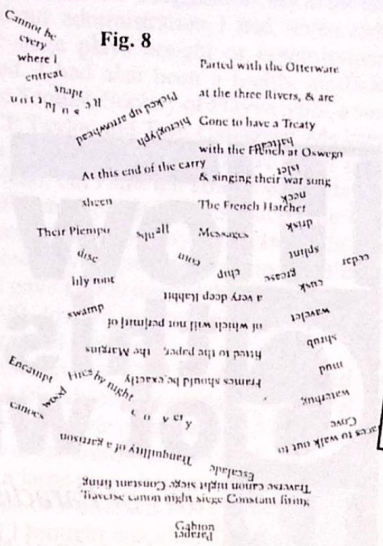


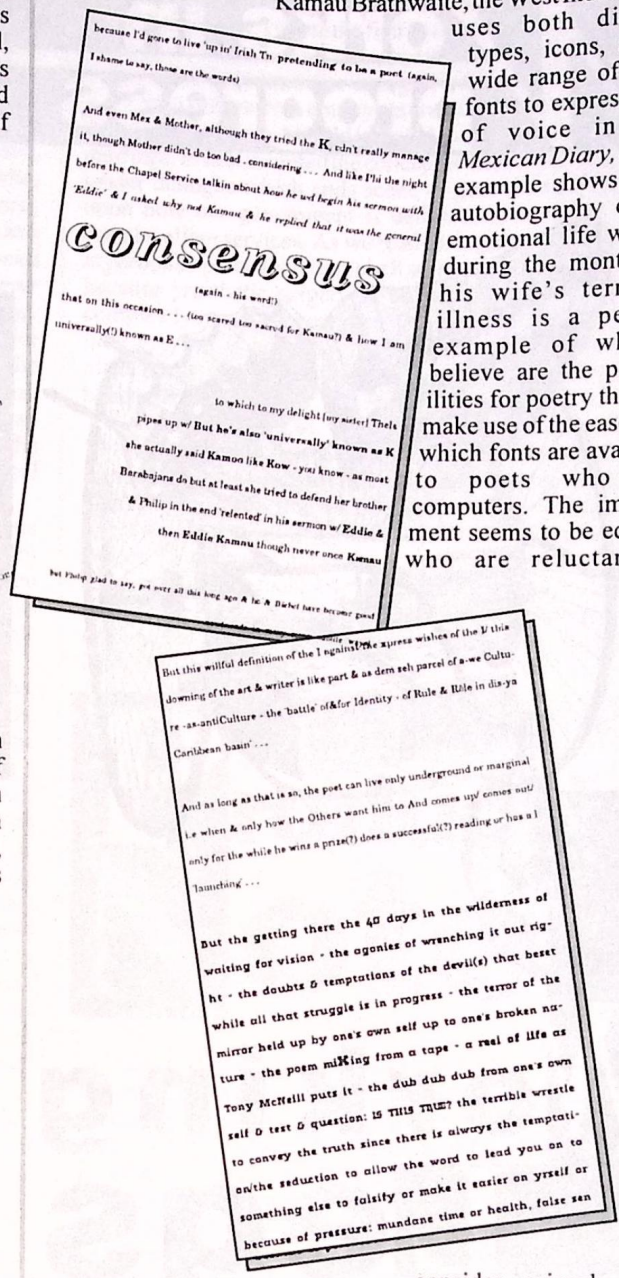
Fig. 8

In another example of Language poetry, from Joan Retallack's "Icarus FFFFFALLING" (Fig. 9), the story of Daedalus and Icarus are told in Latin on one side and in English translation on the other. A collection of somewhat random texts split the page in two, dividing the Latin from its translation, suggesting the tumbling flight of the falling Icarus, and his death, which divides sense from meaning. I find that in spite of the effort to resist the conventional understanding of content, both these poets are available for rich interpretation – that though they deal with the material of the poem to stop the reader from hastening forward, as in the earlier examples, they are not so much concerned with meaninglessness as with meaning.

DAEDALUS INTERA	*et iam Iunonia*	HATING CRETE AND HIS LONG
EXILIUM TACTUSQU	turning the page	/E LAND WAS SHUT IN BY THE
CLAUSUS ERAT PELA	*laesa parte Samos*	' BLOCK ESCAPE BY LAND AND
OBSTRUAT: ET CAEL	space becomes time	HE SAID YET THE SKY IS OPEN
OMNIA POSSIDEAT S	ightnay to nurningmay	THOUGH MINOS RULES OVER
DIXIT ET IGNOTAS /	FAMILY REUNION	'AYING HE SETS HIS MIND AT
NATURAMQUE NOV/	dark islands up light	RTS AND CHANGES THE LAWS
A MINIMA COEPTAS I	appetizers cheese dip	HE LAYS FEATHERS IN ORDER
UT CLIVO CREVISSE I	nuts 'n chips dip	O THAT YOU WOULD THINK
FISTULA DISPARIBUS	liquid smoke up peps	SHIONED RUSTIC PANPIPES
TUM LINO MEDIAS E/	up red meat or fowl	THER. THEN HE FASTENED
ATQUE ITA CONPOSIT	transector sourire jaune	'IT TWINE AND WAX AT THE
VERAS IMITETUR AVE:	filling a position in space	CARUS WAS STANDING BY
STABAT ET IGNARUS SU	was I turning	'ANDLING HIS OWN PERIL
ORE RENIDENTI MODC	trying to keep	'FUL FACE WOULD NOW
CAPTABAT PLUMAS FLA'	every moment	NG BREEZE HAD BLOWN
MOLLIBAT LUSUQUE SU(	civilization falls every day	' WAX WITH HIS THUMB
IMPEDIEBAT OPUS. POST(	behind the words groan	S FATHER'S WONDROUS
INPOSITA EST GEMINAS O(	ayay onay evitationlay	G TOUCHES HAD BEEN
IPSE SUUM CORPUS MOTAC	of every up of or about	BALANCED HIS BODY
INSTRUIT ET NATUM MEDIC	fractal prepositions	'US FLY THE MIDDLE
ICARE AIT MONEO NE SI DEMI	audible in groanwhile	'O LOW THE WATER
GRAVET PENNAS SI CELSIOR IG	playing reflach sweet i.e.	'OU GO TOO HIGH
HELICEN IUBEO STRICTUMQUE I	each second seemed	WORD OF ORION
INTER UTRUMQUE VOLA. NEC TE'	stung my face	WEEN THE TWO.
ME DUCE CARPE VIAM! PARITER HE	miles below	)F FLIGHT AND
TRADIT ET IGNOTAS UMERIS ACCO !	light coals well	' BOY'S SHOUL

Fig. 9

Kamau Brathwaite, the West Indian poet, uses both display types, icons, and a wide range of book fonts to express tone of voice in *Zea Mexican Diary,* as this example shows. This autobiography of his emotional life written during the months of his wife's terminal illness is a perfect example of what I believe are the possibilities for poetry that can make use of the ease with which fonts are available to poets who use computers. The impediment seems to be editors, who are reluctant to consider seriously work that violates the tranquility of the paper field and the transparency of book types.

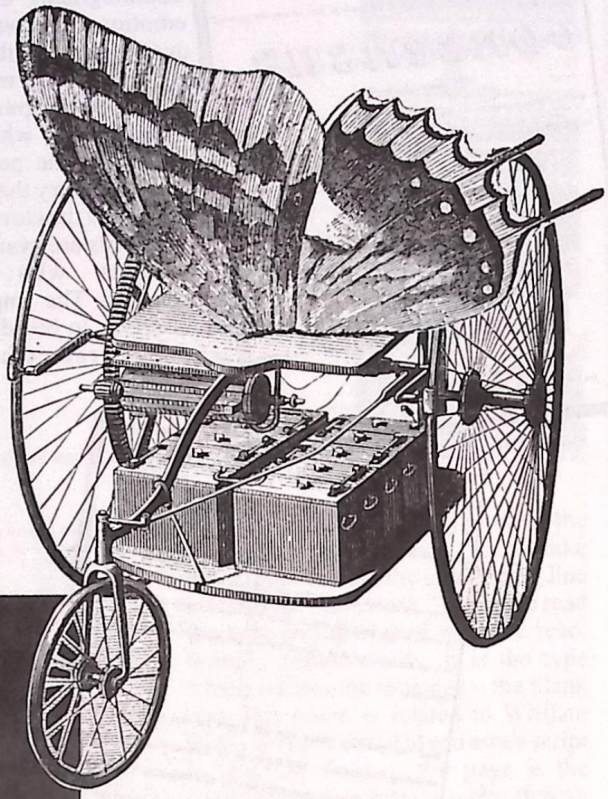

because I'd gone to live 'up in' Irish Tn pretending to be a poet (again,
I shame to say, those are the words)
And even Mex & Mother, although they tried the K, cdn't really manage
it, though Mother didn't do too bad - considering . . . And like I'ld the night
before the Chapel Service talkin about how he wd begin his sermon with
'Eddie' & I asked why not Kamau & he replied that it was the general
consensus
(again - his word!)
that on this occasion . . . (too scared too sacred for Kamau?) & how I am
universally(?) known as E . . .
to which to my delight [my sister] Thela
pipes up w/ But he's also 'universally' known as K
she actually said Kamou like Kow - you know - as most
Barabajans do but at least she tried to defend her brother
& Philip in the end 'relented' in his sermon w/ Eddie &
then Eddie Kamau though never once Kamau
but Philip glad to say, got over all this long Ago & he & Dabet have become good
But this willful definition of the I against the xpress wishes of the W this
downing of the art & writer is like part & as dem seh parcel of a-we Cultu-
re -as-antiCulture - the 'battle' of&for Identity - of Rule & Rile in dis-ya
Caribbean 'basin' . . .
And as long as that is so, the poet can live only underground or marginal
i.e when & only how the Others want him to And comes up/ comes out/
only for the while he wins a prize(?) does a successful(?) reading or has a l
launching . . .
But the getting there the 40 days in the wilderness of
waiting for vision - the agonies of wrenching it out rig-
ht - the doubts & temptations of the devil(s) that beset
while all that struggle is in progress - the terror of the
mirror held up by one's own self up to one's broken na-
ture - the poem miKing from a tape - a reel of life as
Tony McNelli puts it - the dub dub dub from one's own
self & test & question: IS THIS TRUE? the terrible wrestle
to convey the truth since there is always the temptati-
on/the seduction to allow the word to lead you on to
something else to falsify or make it easier on yrself or
because of pressure: mundane time or health, false sen

To sum up this examination of typography in poetry – which is to say the poetry I have been able to locate – I will quote from Wilard Bohn's discussion of Apollinarie in *The Aesthetic of Visual Poetry,* an assessment of visual poetry and its intention that I cannot improve upon:

> " *... visual poetry seeks to alter our concept of reading as well as of writing. In its role as a dual sign it forces us to* look *at the text before we read it, that is, to acknowledge its physical authority ... it prevents us from regarding the text as a transparent vehicle for a larger message. Reading is no longer conceived as a mechanical operation performed on a passive text, but is seen to be a series of interpretive acts designed to overcome the resistance of the written word.*"

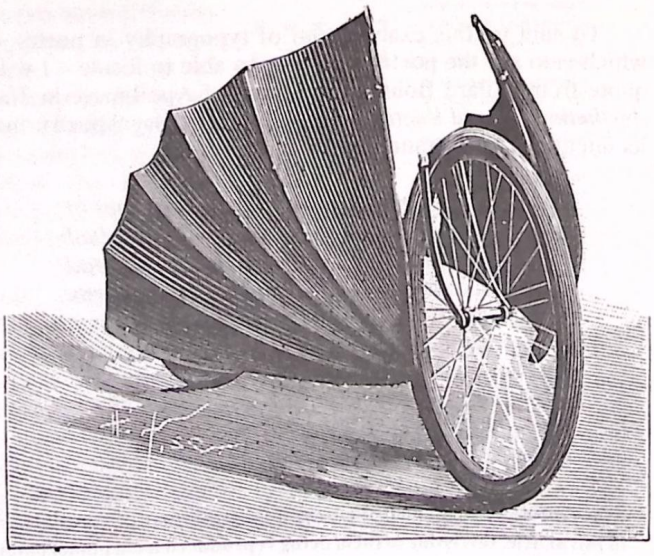
- **the editors apologise for the poor quality of some of the graphics in this article, this is due to them being reproduced from photocopies.**

Works in progress



Working Legs

An Excerpt



How this play Got written

Birds of Paradise is a professional theatre company which gives disabled people acting experience by producing plays in which they perform beside professional actors, and by helping a core of members work with other disabled people. Formed in 1989, in 1995 it became a limited company and registered charity, taking a new name from Ronald Laing's book *Sweet Bird of Paradise* which it had partly dramatized.

A Play by: Alasdair Gray

Here is the council of management listed with surnames in alphabetical order.

Forrest Alexander: wheelchairbound by multiple sclerosis.
Iain Carmichael: chairman, car salesman with experience of theatre company management.
Andrew Dawson: art director and fully qualified drama therapist.
David Maclean: director at the Alpha Project resource centre for people with disabilities.
Patsy Morrison: administrator.
Sylvia Sandeman: paraplegic, disability consultant with Spinal Injuries Scotland.

Only Mr Dawson and Ms Morrison are salaried.

The suggestion that I write a play for the company came from Forrest Alexander. He knew me as a novelist and thought that, since novels and plays equally depend on characters, dialogue and settings, any saleable novelist could write a successful play. This is not always true, as the great novelist Henry James discovered on the first night of his play *Guy Domville*. Had I only written prose fiction I would have rejected Forrest's suggestion, but in the days of a long-forgotten Labour administration I had seven radio, eleven television, four stage plays bought or commissioned, networked or performed. I had also been a highly inefficient minutes secretary of The Scottish Society of Playwrights, a small trade union started by CP Taylor and Tom Gallagher. My career as professional dramatist ended in 1978 with the death of my London agent Francis Head, but I still felt able to write plays for companies who wanted them, so Forrest introduced me to the Birds of Paradise art director. The company applied to the Scottish Arts Council and Glasgow City Council for cash to help the play along. The Arts Council gave £4000 toward the commission; the City Council gave £3500, toward workshopping and practical development. We are grateful to them.

From the 6th of June to the 22nd of August I had nine meetings with actors and friends of the company, always at 5pm on Thursdays, always with Andrew Dawson or Patsy Morrison present, and all but once at the company office, 18 Albion Street near Glasgow Cross, in a large room where we sat round a table among the vivid creations of a disabled folks' art class.

To the first meeting I brought one idea. The play must have strong parts for as many disabled actors as possible, so should be set in a world where the able-bodied were a pitiable minority. The company thought this amusing. Forrest Alexander suggested a wheelchair benefit tribunal to which the able-bodied would (unsuccessfully) appeal. Mrs Anne-Marie Robertson suggested that the tribunal might be a dumb one which spoke to the appellants through an artificial voice box. This grotesque notion was along lines I wanted, but I needed to know the everyday embarrassments of being disabled so that my able-bodied hero could suffer these also. I was told how hard it is for people in wheelchairs to get service in pubs if not accompanied by an able-bodied friend. Anne-Marie Robertson, who has been wheelchair-bound for many years, spoke of some normal people's inability to accept that she was married with three children. When asked, "How did you manage that?" she had to smile and shrug her shoulders. She once had to refuse a good job because acceptance meant flitting to a house where light-switches, taps, cooker and other essential things were out of her reach – she could get no money to re-equip it.

At this first meeting I also heard that my idea was not original. Vic Finkelstein, senior lecturer in disability studies at the Open University, had set a story in a village designed for the badly disabled. The able-bodied who cared for them were endangered by low doors and ceilings and by wheeltracks linking the buildings. Central Television had issued a video cartoon of this story. It makes the same social point as *Working Legs* while being more informative about needs of disabled folk, but plot and characters are different. I have consciously stolen from Mr Finkelstein the low door in scene 2 and Able's offer to wear a safety helmet.

A week later I met Alistair Fleming, a student of architecture before being hit by a car. It had left him partly paralysed and had damaged his short-term memory. He knew my novel *Lanark* because he had read it before the accident. He told me his own story in a jocular way, saying he had been very lucky – in his parents. When hospital treatment stopped doing him good his mother gave up her job to nurse him at home, and both parents had used their savings to fight a long legal battle with the car's insurance company. They won. Alistair now lives in a house adapted to his needs and employs a truly Christian minder.

At a third meeting I met Alice Thomson who suggested her own medical experience could give my play a happy ending. A married woman and working nurse, she had undergone an operation for a heart condition and suffered a stroke during it. She recovered consciousness seven months later without the use of her legs.

This gallant willingness to make fun of terrible experience made my job easy. I wrote the first two scenes in time for the fourth meeting. From then on we sat round the table reading scenes aloud as they were added and discussing how the play should go. Ernest Kyle, who suffers from emphysema and is also a writer, suggested that Able's legginess should have led to the breakdown of an early marriage. Ernest invented the concept of wheel-training, wrote the tender dialogue which ends scene 4, gave detailed information upon how our government is deliberately breaking down the social welfare services. As we read on it grew easy to see readers in particular parts. John Campbell seemed right for Able McMann because prosthetic surgery in both legs lets him walk with a completely natural appearance, yet his thoughtful, anxious face indicates life is not easy. Anne Marie seemed suited to the manager or Meg. It was she who suggested Able's ankles be handcuffed.

At this moment of writing (4.12pm, Tuesday 27 August 1996) the first production is being planned for the autumn of 1997. A member of the company recently said, "It seems a comical play to us now, but by the time we perform it we'll be so sick of working to get it right that we'll wonder why the audience is laughing – if it does!" This strikes me as the right way to produce a comedy. It remains for me to thank Christopher Boyce for advice on how to make scene 10 more convincing, and Angela Mullane for correction on points of law. Chris Boyce also suggested the reappearance of Miss Shy at the end.

Production Notes

In a perfect production of *Working Legs* all wheelbound characters would be played by wheelbound actors, thus saving greatly in production costs, and those acting the Social Worker and Benefits Tribunal would also be blind and deaf. Perfection is not always possible, but sighted actors can play convincingly blind by wearing opaque glasses padded to stop them seeing. The four actors playing the Benefit Tribunal should learn sign-language from someone fluent at it. Most audiences will notice if actors are inventing meaningless repetitive gestures, and some signs (the one for Get rid of him for instance) can be read by anyone. A production in which the Tribunal's sign-speech also appears as words on a screen will gain in humour but lose in sinister effect.

That this play began with a Scottish company is evident from Able McMann saying cannae instead of can't in scene 2; by Meg talking of Caledonian Gubernators as a Scottish firm in scene 6; by Bland using a Scots proverb in scene 9; by Reporter and Editor using one or two demotic Scots words in scene 10. These few words can be changed by any English company into the idiom of its own province, with Able singing *Land of Hope and Glory* instead of *Scots Wha Hae* when preparing to fight the police. Though scene 11 is set in the New Club on Edinburgh's Princes Street there is no need to change the dialogue between the Scottish Secretary of State and a Procurator Fiscal. All that the actors and audience need know is that these men are high heid yins in the British Government and British Conservative Party. Since all the main characters are middle classy English companies may be smart enough to act the whole play without changing it.

I hope it is needless to say that *Working Legs* should not be played for laughs. The more grimly humourless the production the funnier will the audience find it. The society portrayed is – but for a small reversal of physical advantage – ours.

Working Legs

An Excerpt

The story so far

Act One presents a world where hardly anyone can walk. Those who show they can are labelled *hypermanic* and find it almost impossible to get work. Able McMann has suddenly gained the use of his legs through a road accident which left him with an irrational hatred of wheelchairs. This destroyed his marriage and career. However, the love of a good woman has helped him overcome his phobia, use a wheelchair like normal people and be accepted for a new job.

ACT TWO

SCENE 7: THE SUPPLIES DEPARTMENT

CAST – ALL IN WHEELCHAIRS
MEG – a small dour efficient woman who says as little as possible and talks fast when forced to talk.
BLAND – the businessperson of scene one. He should be physically large with an air of calm authority.
ABLE – who now wears a smart business suit, waistcoat and tie.

A telephone rings before the light goes up on centre stage with two desks. The left faces audience and holds a word processor, telephone, empty IN and OUT trays. The right desk faces the left with front edge touching. Here a word processor, both trays and every surface carry overflowing heaps of order forms, manuals and correspondence. MEG *sits at this desk in profile to the audience, telephone handset to ear, patiently trying to soothe someone who is angry about something. While she talks* BLAND *and* ABLE *roll in but she ignores them until* BLAND *speaks to her directly.*

MEG
I'm sorry, I know . . . I know, I'm sorry . . . Yes, I know you should have had them today, yes we promised them today but . . .
[*enter* BLAND *and* ABLE]

BLAND
Here it is, your new dominion, the nerve centre of Scottish gubernator supply.

MEG
. . . no, sorry, no I can't promise delivery tomorrow though I'll do my best, sorry, goodbye.
[*She puts the phone down and taps rapidly on the word processor.*]

BLAND
[*indicating* MEG]
This is Meg, your assistant, who has been with us for twenty years. She knows more about gubernator supply than anyone else here – even me! Especially me, whose grandfather started the business! Isn't that right Meg?

MEG
[*pausing with fingers on keyboard*]
Yes?

BLAND
You know more about this business than anyone else. Right?

MEG
Yes!
[*She resumes typing.*]

BLAND
Not so fast! Meet Able McMann, your new boss. Put him in the picture. Show him the grips. Teach him the moves Meg and don't be too hard on him.
[MEG *folds her arms and looks at* ABLE *with an aspect of expressionless waiting.*]

ABLE
[*trying to be nice*]
I'm very glad to meet you.

MEG
Hullo.

BLAND
[*producing cigarette case*]
Good, I'll leave you to get on with it. I'll have a word with Dimitri Suave of foreign orders, a tremendous character, the life and soul of any party. I'll come back later to see how you're doing and make some suggestions . . .
[*He pauses to light a cigarette. The phone rings.* MEG *lifts it.*]

MEG
Yes? . . . No, I'm sorry . . . I'm sorry, I know . . . Yes I know we promised them for last week but . . .
[*Part of the above is drowned by* BLAND *talking loud to be heard over it.*]

BLAND
Learn all you can from Meg but don't let her bully you! Our last supplies chief was so wholly under her thumb that we had to let him go – he didn't last a fortnight. Remember, the buck stops with you! Bye bye!
[*Exit* BLAND. ABLE *faces* MEG.]

MEG
. . . I'm sorry, I can't promise a definite delivery date before the consignment leaves our depot, but I'll do my best . . . I'm sorry, that's all I can do.
[*She puts phone down and faces* ABLE.]

MEG
Welcome to hell.
[ABLE *stares at her.*]

MEG
I said welcome to hell.

ABLE
[*going behind the left desk*]
You're obviously telling me something
but I need an explanation.
[ABLE *waits for explanation with folded arms on desktop.*]

MEG
[*sighing*]
I'll make it short and simple. We're a long-established Scottish firm which supplies things a lot of people want, but we're losing business to an English competitor with one advantage over us.

ABLE
Superior technology?

MEG
No.

ABLE
Better advertising?

MEG
No.

ABLE
Competitive underpricing?

MEG
No. Their senior management in London lets their Scottish management get on with the job. Our Senior Management Group – I call them the Smug – draw big salaries for doing sweet damn nothing. I don't mind that. It is a fact of life that the least productive people get the most money. But our Smug aren't content with money, they feel insecure if they aren't issuing commands, so they give folk like you and me – especially folk like me – instructions which make efficiency impossible.

ABLE
That can't be the whole story.

MEG
Then forget it. Would you sign these supply forms? I can't authorize them now you're here. [*She offers him a fat sheaf.*]

ABLE
[*not taking them*]
Have you checked them? Are they in order?

MEG
Yes.

ABLE
You could issue them when I wasn't here?

MEG
Yes, between bosses it's me who issues them.

ABLE
Then I – your present boss – don't want to waste time signing these forms. Send them out as they are.

MEG
[*with a pitying shake of the head*]
Sorry boss. If I do that the Smug will say I've taken over your job and you – not me! – will be reprimanded.
[ABLE *takes the forms and with gloomy rapidity signs and piles them up while* MEG *taps briskly on her keyboard. These activities continue as they talk.*]

ABLE
It strikes me . . . that the Smug . . . should have given you my job.

MEG
[*nodding*]
Yes.

ABLE
Did they not do it because you're a woman?

MEG
They didn't do it because they knew I would tell them to their faces what I've told them for years through interior memoranda which they ignore.

ABLE
Why did my predecessor only last a fortnight?

MEG
He was conscientious. He tried to improve things.
[*The phone rings on* MEG's *desk.*]

ABLE
I'll handle it!
[*He lifts his phone with the left hand and continues signing with the right.*]
Yes, supplies here . . . I'm sorry, I didn't know . . . Yes, I can well believe it . . . No I cannot give you a new delivery date because though I am head of supplies I only started work today and have not yet come to grips with some hitches generated by what I am told is a new computer programme, but rest assured that your problem is now top of the Caledonian Gubernator priority list. Good day.

MEG
[*impressed, but still typing*]
Well done. Who was it?

ABLE
[*busily signing again*]
Clapperclaw Service Stations.

MEG
Poor souls! They're ninth on our priority list. I wish the government hadn't scrapped the hyperactive welfare scheme. It would save us time and money to have a cheap hyperactive sitting in a cubicle doing nothing but apologize over the phone. Something wrong?
[*She looks at* ABLE *who now scowls at the forms in front of him, tapping them steadily with the end of his pen. She stops typing.*]

MEG
Is something wrong?

ABLE
[*abruptly*]
The woman I love is pregnant and lives with her parents. I live in a bedsit not much bigger than a cubicle in a house full of sick and elderly people. I want to marry, get a nice home, support a family. I need this job. How can I keep it?

MEG
[*shrugging*]
Easy. Don't do a damn thing except suck up to the senior

management. Pass on their orders to your underlings without question and when chaos follows blame us for it. Entertain the Smug with all sorts of stories about our stupidity and incompetence. Never never never suggest that they change their ways. They'll think you one of them and your future here will be secure – as long as the firm lasts. I give it five years at the latest.

[*She sighs.*]

And now if I can attend to my work I may achieve a miracle – six thousand double-elephant gubernators delivered to Alpha Index of Coventry on time today. They're the only big company which still has faith in us and please! Finish signing these forms.

[MEG *resumes tapping her keyboard,* ABLE *his glum but swift signing of forms.* BLAND *enters in excellent spirits.* MEG *ignores him.*]

BLAND

Busy busy busy are we? Good good good. There is something you can do for me, Able. I've just had a phone call from Sir Arthur Shots, a very gallant old soldier and near cousin of Humpty Dipsy. Though three score and ten he still plays his regular eighteen holes round the Royal and Ancient and his golfchair needs a new gubernator. Knowing I am in the business he has asked me to send one fast without using the normal boring supply channels. He only needs one wee small tiny semi-demi gubernator of the sort we supply to Clapperclaw Service Stations and Capperclaw are not fast deliverers –

ABLE

I know why; you see we –

BLAND

Allow me to finish. What you KNOW is less important than what you DO, so tell Meg to stop what she's doing and give top priority to Arthur Shots. I hear that a truck is leaving the depot for Coventry shortly. Get Meg to send it to St Andrews first – she'll find Arthur's exact address in Who's Who. It is an honour and privilege to be useful to such a man.

[BLAND *smiles genially at* ABLE. MEG *stops typing, folds arms and watches* ABLE *expressionlessly.* ABLE *shuts eyes, sucks his lower lip for two seconds, opens his eyes and speaks quietly but firmly.*]

ABLE

Mr Bland, that's impossible. That truck is delivering a huge consignment to our best client and they won't arrive as promised if we divert it to –

[BLAND, *wagging a forefinger, interrupts more genially than ever.*]

BLAND

Nothing is impossible Able! Never let the word impossible be heard within the walls of Caledonian Gubernators! I see you have been got at by the excellent and indispensable Miss Meg, a middle-management pessimist who would sink us all in gloom if ignorant males like us did not take a broader view. Numerically speaking, yes, it is foolish to deliver six thousand double elephants later than promised so that one little wee tiny semi-demi is delivered on time, but priorities are not always governed by arithmetic. Sir Arthur is on the board of many important companies. Clapperclaw Services and Alpha Index of Coventry could well be among them. So! Now! Do! What! I! Say!

[BLAND *shows all his teeth in a fixed grin.* ABLE *shuts his eyes, folds his arms tight and rocks to and fro.*]

BLAND

[*sharply*]

Well?

ABLE

[*loudly, without looking at* MEG]

Do what he says.

MEG

[*giving a smart military salute*]

Yes sir! At once sir! I'll go and look for a Who's Who sir!

[MEG *swings her chair round and leaves fast.* BLAND *calls after her, laughing:*]

BLAND

My secretary will give you one Meg, hahahaha! What a weird sense of humour she has, women are inexplicable . . . Is anything wrong?

[ABLE *still rocks to and fro with shut eyes, tightly grasping the arms of his chair.*]

BLAND

[*gently and kindly*]

You seem ill – can I do something to help?

[BLAND *lays a kindly hand on* ABLE*'s arm.* ABLE *suddenly opens eyes and shows his teeth in a hysterical grin.*]

ABLE

You can do nothing to help but vanish!

[*stands up*]

Disappear!

[*shakes clenched fists and roars*]

Fuck off out of here!

[BLAND *recoils in terror, leaves swiftly.* ABLE *drops back into chair and covers face with hands.*]

END OF SCENE

SCENE 8: BENEFIT TRIBUNAL

CAST

A)
B) Four deaf mute social workers
C) fluent in sign language
D)

ABLE – on his feet again, wearing the suit of scene 6 but less smartly.

NEXT CASE – also with working legs but one line only.

Front left a white circular mat 18 inches across with a black blindfold on it, the blindfold with elastic for ease of putting on and off.

Back right and angled to confront the mat, a platform high enough to lift the heads of those sitting there above the head of anyone standing below. A table on the platform has A *and* B *sitting side-by-side behind,* A *with a pushbell,* B *with an Anglepoise lamp casting strong light on the mat – other light is comparatively dim.* C *and* D *sit one at each end of the table. All four have sheaves of typed reports and printed forms on tabletop or armrest.*

All four are wired to an artificial voicebox in the centre of the table so in the following dialogue it is impossible to say exactly which is speaking. It must be one who has watched ABLE*'s lips, but two of them are always doing this, though never the same two. Throughout this scene messages are being exchanged in sign language. Directions for them are given in a different typeface because they don't interrupt the dialogue though happening at the same time, and* ABLE *is not aware of it.*

The scene starts with A *striking the pushbell as* B *and* C *examine papers.*

VOICEBOX
[*loudly*]
Next case – Able McMann.
[ABLE *enters left and stares down at mat and then at the tribunal, unsure what to do.*]

VOICEBOX
Stand on that spot facing the light and we'll have no trouble reading your lips Mr McMann.
[ABLE *picks up the blindfold and stands where it lay, blinking into the light as B adjusts the Anglepoise lamp and tightens the screw so that the beam rests on* ABLE*'s face.*]

C
[*signing to* D]
How's your head feeling now?

D
[*signing back*]
Horrible! Probably still as bad as yours.

A
[*signing to* C *and* D]
Careful! Maybe he can read us.

VOICEBOX
Use the blindfold if the light hurts your eyes.

ABLE
[*humbly*]
Thank you.
[*puts on blindfold*]
Thank you, that's a lot better. Am I looking the right way again?

A
[*signing to the rest*]
We've six others to see before the break. Be quick with this one.

VOICEBOX
Yes. Why are you standing there Mr McMann?

ABLE
Because soon I'll need money – soon I'll be penniless.

VOICEBOX
You think standing gets more sympathy than sitting down?
[D *frowns down at his papers.*]

ABLE
No!

VOICEBOX
You came off the hyperactive register after holding a good desk job for six months. A recent medical report says the doctor found no muscular or nervous ailment to stop you sitting down for fourteen or fifteen hours a day – like many other hyperactives who manage to lead normal lives.

ABLE
[*hesitantly*]
Then that doctor . . . is not a good doctor . . . because he ignored what I said. I told him that when worried about the future – when terrified of the future – I stand or walk about until I drop. If he suspected me of lying he should have got one of your snoopers – sorry sorry one of your investigators – to learn the truth from my neighbours.

C
Oh we've a real Smart Alec here, haven't we? This one fancies himself as a lawyer!

A
He's right though. In a juster world . . .

D
We haven't the resources to be just.

A
But in a kinder world –

D
We haven't the resources to be kind.

VOICEBOX
Our doctors are overworked, Mr McMann, and despite rumours to the contrary there is a limit to our number of investigators. You have been employed twice since you came off the hyperactive register and both times left work on your first day. Why?

ABLE
At Caledonian Gubernators I did not see eye to eye with the director –

VOICEBOX
So you resorted to menacing language.

ABLE
Only a little! I'm not a violent man – I've no record of menacing behaviour before then –

VOICEBOX
[*without pause between sentences*]
You have now why did you leave Hurricane Sales Service?
ABLE
I was shut in a room full of teenagers, young folk who don't feel it's rude and intrusive to phone housewives and elderly folk and talk them into letting in even tougher salesmen, but I –

VOICEBOX
Felt able to pick and choose you received nineteen thousand insurance compensation for the initial injury of which nine thousand seven hundred and twelve were repaid to Social Welfare leaving nine thousand two eighty eight what became of it?

C
What chance do you think Iron Butterfly has for the two-thirty at Uttoxeter?

B
Shut up! Some of us have to watch the poor bugger's mouth.

D
We've seen a million poorer buggers. Iron Butterfly hasn't a hope in hell.

ABLE
After repaying my parents' legal expenses loan I had less than seven hundred left. That's what I've been living on but I'm down to my last two hundred and will lose my bedsit in two or three weeks if I can't get –

VOICEBOX
Won't your parents help?

ABLE
They're old people living in sheltered housing and afraid of illness and with the National Health Service as it is I don't want to bother them. Do you need to ask all these questions? I've answered them again and again in forms I've filled in several times. Have you not read them?

VOICEBOX
You argue very strongly for someone who wants us to think he's in a weak position.
[ABLE *helplessly shrugs shoulders, shakes head.*]

C
He's no answer to that one!

A
But his body language is eloquent.

ABLE
[*appealing*]
Surely you're paid to HELP people like me – not to make us feel guilty.

D
Get rid of him.

VOICEBOX
We are paid to separate scroungers and spongers from those who need help and deserve support. Your aggressiveness and rejection of job opportunities are not attitudes that deserve support. You admit that at present you do not need help since you have a room and money for rent. Should your material circumstances change in the near future you are entitled to apply to us again in six weeks. Goodbye.
[A *hits the pushbell*, B *switches the lamp off and they converse among themselves while* ABLE *pleads on.*]

ABLE
But if you don't give me cash I'll be homeless in six weeks. Without a fixed address I can't apply to you again! Your rules don't allow it. Yes I might hold on a bit longer by begging from my parents and the woman I love but I don't want to beg, I'd feel dirty, feel despicable begging, don't make me a beggar please. You seem to think I'm a tough guy but I'm not, I'm an ordinary man who did a steady nine to five job, did exactly what I was told, like you do! I paid taxes just like you do for eight years before my accident. Are you listening to me? Please? Are you?

A
That was a tough one!

B
I admired his attitude to his parents.

D
If he's not a fool we've taught him a lesson which will do him good.

C
He's a fool, a bore, a snob and a weakling and we're rid of him – thank goodness – for ever.

A
A year ago we would have helped him.

B
Those days have gone for ever.

C
Look, he's still raving at us!
[*A looks at a sheaf of papers and hits the pushbell again.*]

VOICEBOX
Next applicant please – Jack O'Rourke.

ABLE
Did you not hear what I said?
[A *tough looking guy enters left and slaps* ABLE's *shoulder.*]

NEXT APPLICANT
My turn for the blindfold mate.
[ABLE *pulls blindfold off and stares at* NEXT APPLICANT, *open mouthed.*]

END OF SCENE

SCENE 9: A LOUNGE BAR

CAST
BARTENDER)
THRUST)
BLAND) exactly as in scene one
SUAVE)
COY)
MISS SHY – a spinster with working legs and no wheel chair
ABLE – spruce and confident
FOUR OF THE CHAIR POLICE

The scene is set exactly like the start of scene one, except that MISS SHY *crouches on a folding stool to one side, nursing on her knee a handbag which held the stool and trying, with small beckonings, to get the* BARTENDER's *attention.*

THRUST
He comes from the shoot-em kill-em brigade into contract management and doesn't even know that a contract locks you into a fixed profit margin.

BLAND
You told me that quite a while ago.

THRUST
It still happens. Same again?

BLAND
Please.

THRUST
Bartender! Same again!

BARTENDER
Certainly sir.

SUAVE
[*intimately*]
My wife mentioned you over breakfast this morning.

COY
Oo! What did she say?

SUAVE
"Who's that woman in your office who dresses with unusual elegance?" I told her I knew nobody like that in my office.

COY
[*smiling and placing her hand on his*]
You've a wild sense of humour. I could never fall for a man who hadn't a wild sense of humour. Let's be wicked. Let's have another.

SUAVE
Same again, bartender!

BARTENDER
In a minute sir!

THRUST
Common workmen are no trouble nowadays and soon the skilled technicians will knuckle under too. Who'll need them? Their work will be done by Brazilian and Chinese orphans paid with handfuls of food – and glad to get it.

BLAND
Yes, facts are chiels that winna ding, Sandy. My turn to pay.
[BLAND *pays* BARTENDER *who has just served drink.*]

BARTENDER
[*calling to* SUAVE]
Two gins and tonics was it sir?

SUAVE
[*indicating* MISS SHY]
Yes but I believe this lady should be served first – she's been waiting some time.
[MISS SHY *smiles gratefully at* SUAVE, COY *pats his hand approvingly, he shrugs modestly.*]

BARTENDER
It's not easy to see people whose heads are not on the usual level sir. What would you like madam?

MISS SHY
A small dry sherry if it's no trouble thank you!
[*Enter* ABLE *in a wheelchair, very fast. He wears a dandelion flower in his lapel and hides hysterical excitement under a cheerful manner.*]

BARTENDER
Is alcohol alright for someone in your condition?

MISS SHY
[*nodding*]
Yes! My doctor recommends it.

ABLE
[*boisterously*]
There's a voice I know! Don't worry bartender, this lady is a friend of mine. Give her what she wants and give me a large Glenfiddich!

BARTENDER
[*smartly*]
At once sir!
[ABLE *sits facing* MISS SHY *with his back to the rest of the room. He speaks quietly to her at first and is ignored by all but* BLAND.]

MISS SHY
I'm sorry but I don't know you at all.

ABLE
Never mind. I hate these selfish bastards as much as you do.

MISS SHY
[*alarmed*]
I don't hate anyone, what do you mean?

ABLE
I'll show you if nobody's watching. Are they?

MISS SHY
[*looking*]
A big man over there is watching.
[ABLE *swivels his chair round, looks, then waves, smiling broadly.*]

ABLE
A fine evening Mr Bland! Do you remember me?

BLAND
[*sternly*]
Indeed I do.

ABLE
No hard feelings I hope Mr Bland?

BLAND
[*relaxing and smiling*]
None at all Mr McMann!
Glad to see you looking so much better.
[BLAND *turns and talks quietly to* THRUST. ABLE, *seeing nobody watching now, turns back to* MISS SHY *and shoots both legs out straight for a second.*]

MISS SHY
[*nodding gravely*]
I see.

ABLE
[*patting his chairarm*]
I only need this contraption to get service in bars.
[BARTENDER *approaches with tray of drinks, including gins ordered by* SUAVE. ABLE *puts a five-pound note on his tray.*]

ABLE
Keep the change, tonight I have something to celebrate. Do you remember me, by the way?

BARTENDER
[*staring*]
Thank you sir but I can't say I do.

ABLE
Forget it.
[*to* MISS SHY]
Yes, I'm celebrating tonight. Skol!
[ABLE *drinks.* BARTENDER *serves* SUAVE *and* COY, *but thereafter watches* ABLE *thoughtfully.*]

MISS SHY
[*placing her glass on the floor*]
Are you drunk?

ABLE
Slightly. But don't worry. An hour will pass before my condition gets me into serious trouble.
[*He drinks again.*]

MISS SHY
Oh please don't lose control! Things get much worse if you do – I once lost control.

ABLE
You haven't asked what I'm celebrating.

MISS SHY
[*concerned for him*]
You mustn't lose control!

ABLE
I am celebrating a new life.
[*He drinks.*]
After closing time tonight I will be a new age traveller, a nomad, gypsy, sponger, scrounger, parasite, one of Great Britain's mighty army of homeless and hopeless.
[*more thoughtfully*]
Tomorrow I may also be a father.

MISS SHY
[*horrified*]
You should be saving every penny, not spending it on drink.
ABLE

The money I am spending is rent due to a landlord who has evicted me. If I pay him I will not only be homeless but penniless so I am giving myself a treat before taking to the road.

MISS SHY
[*very quietly*]
You're frightening me.

ABLE
[*sincerely*]
I'm sorry.

BLAND
[*quietly, to* THRUST]
All the same he makes me decidedly uneasy. Let's go.
[BLAND *and* THRUST *start to go out handing their glasses to* BARTENDER *as they pass.*]

ABLE
[*boisterously*]
Leaving already Mr Bland? I hoped there would be time for another wee get-together – a friendly return match for Auld Lang Syne. You definitely beat me last time.
[BLAND *and* THRUST *leave fast.*]

ABLE
Another large malt please!

BARTENDER
Sorry sir but you've had enough.

ABLE
I'm the best judge of that. Don't touch it!
[*The* BARTENDER *freezes, his fingers almost touching the handset of a phone.* ABLE *gets up, walks swiftly across, rips the handset from the wall and flings it away. He then speaks to* SUAVE *and* COY *in a loud, firm, sober voice:*]

ABLE
Closing time lady and gentleman. I'm afraid I must ask you to leave.

SUAVE
Certainly certainly!
[*Knocking his gin back he rushes out in abject panic.*]

COY
[*squealing and pursuing*]
You bastard, wait for me!
[MISS SHY *stands up, clutching her handbag and weeping with pity.*]

BARTENDER
[*grimly*]
You're in trouble – serious trouble.
[ABLE *grips back of* BARTENDER*'s chair and pushes it toward the exit saying:*]

ABLE
So fetch the police. Tell them I haven't a gun, haven't a knife but will put up a fight all the same – just for laughs – just for exercise. Right?

BARTENDER
[*rolling off*]
Right, but you really are in trouble!
[ABLE *goes to* MISS SHY, *picks up her stool, folds it and holds it out to her.*]

ABLE
[*cheerfully and kindly*]
Open up!
MISS SHY
[*weeping and shaking her head*]
You've lost control, you've lost control!

ABLE
[*smiling*]
I honestly think I've gained it. Open up.

MISS SHY
[*opening her handbag*]
I would like to stay with you but I'm too frightened!
Too frightened!

ABLE
[*slipping the stool inside*]
Will you take a message for me? To my wife –
I mean to my girlfriend, Betty Macrae.

[MISS SHY *nods hard.*]
ABLE
She's in a maternity ward of the Queen Mother's. Tell her not to be ashamed of me because I'm not ashamed of myself! Tell her to tell our child – when it's old enough – that Daddy started life as a wimp who not even hyperactivity could change. Tell Betty that I achieved manhood through her love and the promise of a child. Betty Macrae and my child gave me the guts to be nasty and violent instead of helpless and pitiable. Tell her I am now a force to reckon with, a father to be proud of!
[*raising a clenched fist*]
Hypermanics of the world, unite!
[MISS SHY, *inspired, drops her bag and embraces him vigorously.*]

MISS SHY
You're wonderful – I'm staying here!
[*They kiss fiercely then* ABLE *holds her away from him.*]

ABLE
No! You must deliver my message!
[*He releases her. Stooping to pick up her handbag she looks up to him saying:*]

MISS SHY
I will tell it to everyone!

ABLE
[*pointing off*]
Go! And remember, walk tall!

MISS SHY
[*standing up*]
This is the happiest moment of my life.

ABLE
Same here!
[*As* MISS SHY *leaves, walking on tiptoe as tall as possible,* ABLE *dances a jig round the stage. It ends with him pushing his wheelchair off then picking up the glass of sherry.*]

ABLE
Clear decks for action!
[*He goes to bar and sits on it, pondering.*]
Half an hour ago I expected to pass the night dead drunk in a cardboard box under the Monkland motorway. Now I'll pass it in a solid room with inside lavatory, clean blankets and regular big mugs of sweet hot milky tea at the taxpayer's expense. Why haven't other homeless folk discovered that option? Perhaps they have. Of course they have. It explains the soaring crime rate.
[*He drains sherry glass in one swallow, puts it down, stands, takes a larger glass in each hand and fills them simultaneously from suspended gin and whisky bottles singing:*]
ABLE

Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled,
Scots wham Bruce has aften led,
Welcome to your gory bed –
Or to victory!
[*He swallows the glass of whisky in three gulps. Sounds of rapidly approaching police sirens.*]

ABLE
Now's the day and now's the hour,
See the front o' battle lour,
See approach proud Edward's power –
Chains and slavery!
[*He swallows the gin. The sirens stop, there is slamming of doors, then silence as he puts glass down and advances in crouching posture to midstage, arms flexed at sides, fingers hooked like claws, eyes looking left to right as he croons softly:*]
ABLE
Wha will be a traitor knave?
Wha can fill a coward's grave?
Wha sae base as be a slave?
Let him turn and flee! Welcome, lads!
[*Two* POLICE *wearing vizored helmets appear left in motorized chairs; another pair to the right. They have truncheons, handcuffs, lassoes, maybe nets. The next action must be choreographed by the cast and director, but at first their efforts to encircle him fail as he leaps and dodges, crying:*]

ABLE
Good! . . Well done. . . Yes, nearly! . . Nearly had me there! . . . Oops, another near thing! . . Ouch, yah you've got me!
[*They entangle him and he goes limp.*]
All right, I surrender, you've definitely got me.
[*They pull the ropes tighter.*]
Ouch – that hurts!
[*They hoist him upside down and handcuff his ankles together.*]
Hey, there's no need – no need for this!
[*Two drag him off by the legs followed closely by two pulling out their truncheons. As he vanishes off stage he yells in panic:*]
I'm not black! I'm not black!
[*A sharp crack is followed by a sharp scream, another crack by another scream, a third crack by silence.*]

END OF SCENE

NorthWords

The Magazine From The North
For Short Fiction And Poetry

Prices – including postage

Subscription (3 issues) £7.50
Sample copy £2.50
Back issues no 3 £2.50

Become a subscriber to a high quality literary magazine with a growing reputation for a stimulating mix of written material along with exciting use of graphic images.
Free copy of NorthWords no 1 or 2 with new subscriptions

Tom Bryan, Editor, 68 Strathkanaird, Ullapool, IV26 2TN
Please make cheques payable to:
NorthWords

Poem by: Christine McNeill

Keepsake

"Unlucky," grandmother said, when I left Vienna
on a Friday the thirteenth. "Mrs Svoboda
went for a walk on such a day
and could not find her way back."

She gave me her rosary
and four-leaved clover.
At Heathrow I walked bravely
through "Something to declare".

Cold nights. No heating.
I sat up in socks and gloves,
learning: "Fish out of water",
"Other fish to fry" ...

In church I said prayers in troubled defence
for staying away longer than six months.
A helplessness endured in my pocket
each time the offertory bowl passed.

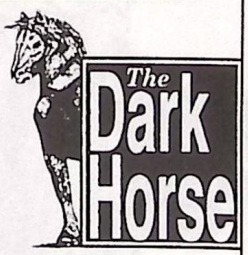
That candle on coloured tissue paper:
as a child I wanted to fix it to a window,
but grandmother had put a cardboard on the back
and no light shone through.

The verger pulled a white cloth
over bruised coins.
Old women's ruddy cheeks
dissolved in the sun's glittering pinwheel.

The priest blessed.
We filed out.
My hand, like a fish,
returned to the water.

Scotland's International Poetry Magazine

NEW



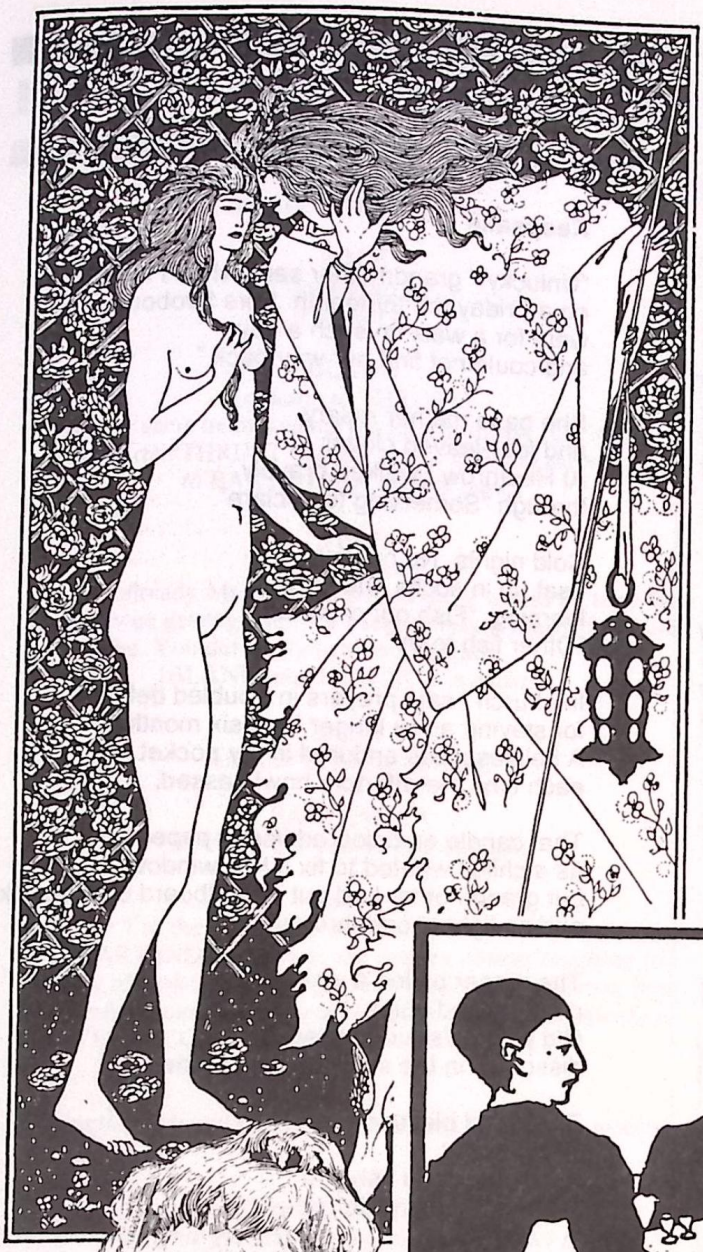
Poetry
Polemic
Appreciations
Reviews

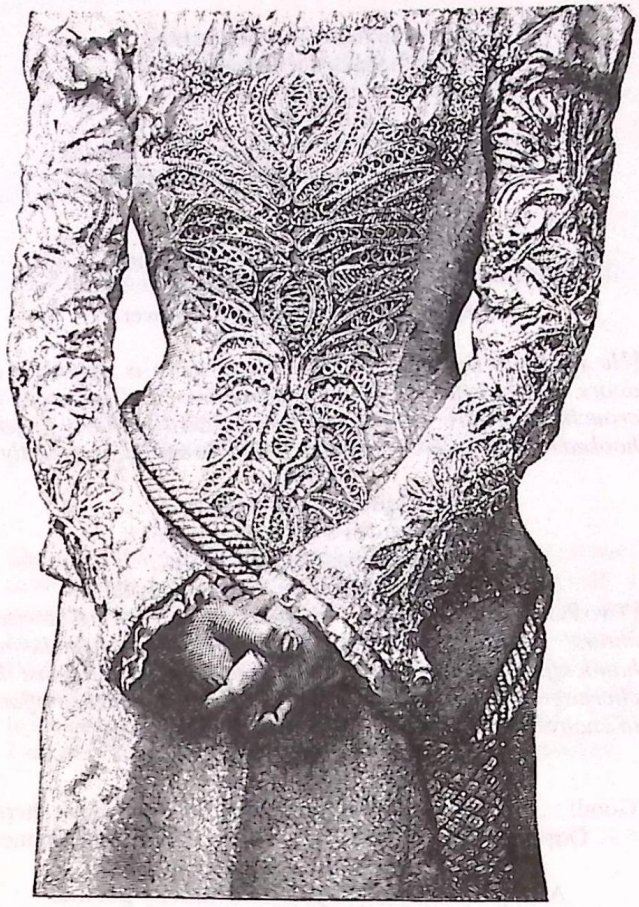
A. D. Hope
Donald Justice
X. J. Kennedy
Edwin Morgan
Iain Crichton Smith
Richard Wilbur
Anne Stevenson
Annie Finch
Kirkpatrick Dobie
George Mackay Brown
Wendy Cope
Tom Disch
Donald Davie
Dana Gioia
Anthony Hecht
Gail White
William Neill
Sophie Hannah

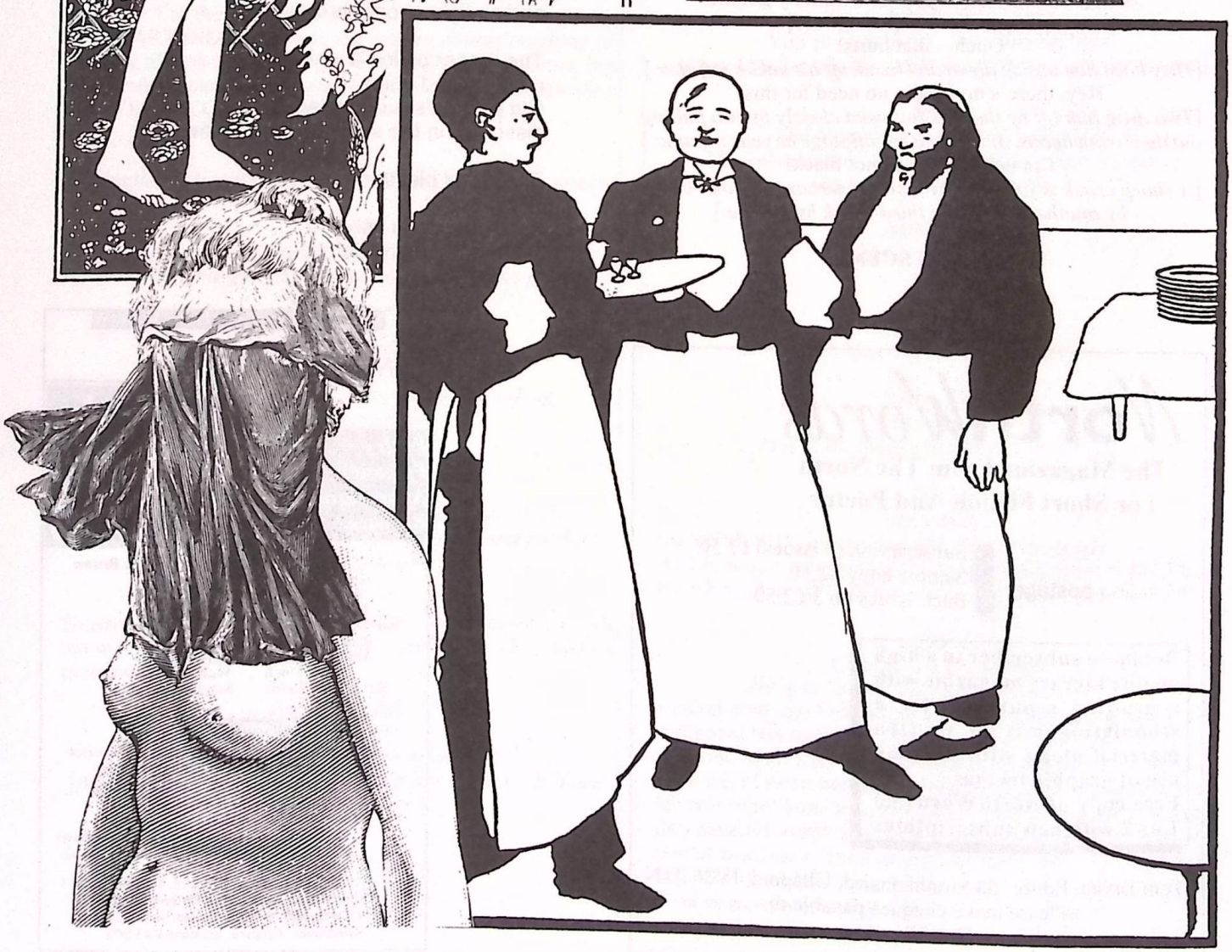
Interviews and essays

Thomas M. Disch | Poetry Reviewing in America
Richard Wilbur | Writes to the *New Yorker*
Wendy Cope | In Conversation
Dana Gioia | On Robert Frost
Edwin Morgan | A Burns Celebration
Ian Hamilton | On Poets, Magazines, and Poetry
Ann Karkalas | Kirkpatrick Dobie's Dumfries

U.S. subscription (3 issues) $18, U.K. subscription £11, payable to "Dark Horse Writers", from: Gerry Cambridge, 19 Cunninghamhead Estate, By Kilmarnock, Ayrshire, Scotland KA3 2PY.







Poems by: A.M. Forster

Sketches by Candlelight

Ellen Beardsley turns to the window, the lime groves
of the Cote d'Azur mirrored in her damp eyes.
The Doctor exits, bowing condolences. Her dreams
have rattled their last breath. Aubrey lies dead.

At school Beardsley burns
with knowledge of numbered days.
Blistering masters rap knuckles on ivory
to force hollow marching from hands
that would waltz on keys,
and urge empty shapes on paper
among imagination's goblins
and the beauties of an adolescent mind

but after lights out, in the dormitory
passion flies in coarse sketches,
innocence glows for a giggling audience.
Sometimes, trips through Brighton to the theatre,
where words that intrigued by guilty candle-flame
burst into meaning in a blaze of honest light.
All this he empties in letters to Mabel
while he battles heavy eyes.

Beardsley twisted in sober suit, bent
over a draughtsman's desk, sacred pen-and-ink
controlled by compass and ruler,
gas-lit London behind a high window.

He coughs his way home through alleys,
searching celebrations in desperate taverns
and women, treasure concealed
behind tattered veils.

Only at night can he answer his hunger,
anguish transformed by Japanesque lines
into Satyrs and Demons,
marching by candlelight into the dawn.

Introductions in his pocket,
Beardsley gambols like a clown
through the studios and galleries
of Paris, reads Balzac and Baudelaire
in parks saturated with blossom,
raises a glass to freedom
in cabarets down dusky stairways
where voices rasp love
and Toulouse Lautrec sits,
stunted frame crowned like Bacchus.

The moon like a soiled plate
hangs over the Seine.

The heart of the next age parades
through the drawing room in Pimlico
where Aubrey and Mabel command
their afternoons.

A chosen few are lured upstairs
with a wink and a crooked finger.
Beardsley cackles like Pan
over Japanese prints, saturated
with lust and puzzles of bodies.

Later, Mabel pads to the door,
sleep smashed by a crescendo
of Wagner and midnight laughter.

Theatres are locked tonight.
Wilde sits in a cell
for love of the forbidden.

London blazes with books.
Boots rap cobbles,
delirious percussion.

Bachelors dash to Europe
or huddle with relatives
to find fiancées.

Beardsley's laughter
is everywhere, a cat winking
on Society's head,

but mirth is shattered
by the cacophony of a people
hungry for rules.

The Mediterranean glitters, but Aubrey
does not see. His hands can no longer
pick up pen. In the eye of the fever
he sometimes remembers Mabel's hand
slipping from his farewell grasp,
he sometimes remembers the cheque
from Smithers is late again.

He and Mother have these rooms
because Raffalovich pays the bills.
Sometimes he hears Mother
read out loud the books Raffalovich sends,
the price of his generosity. Perhaps
he is right and God is the answer,
the end of sweat-swamped nights,

of a head full of colours
where once was simply black and white.

Beardsley, Aubrey Vincent (1872-1898)
English artist, whose sensitive, highly imaginative style and hedonistic, occasionally macabre subject matter place him within the European fin-de-siècle artistic movement. In his short life (his productive career spanned only six years), Beardsley achieved a reputation as one of England's most innovative illustrators.
Beardsley, born in Brighton, briefly attended the Westminster School of Art in London. Other than this short stint of formal training, he was self-taught. By the age of 20 he was executing art commissions. Characteristic of his work are large areas of black and white, hard, curving lines, rich ornamentation, and disregard of conventional perspective and proportion. Recognizable influences include the great Japanese printmakers and the pre-Raphaelite painters. The fantastic and occasionally erotic nature of his illustrations aroused great controversy.
A lifelong victim of tuberculosis, he died in Menton, France, at age 25. His distinctive style remained a powerful influence on graphic design in Europe and the United States.

Paper Tiger

Martin never made friends very easily. To be fair to him, he was aware of this. Most people in his situation, even the most anoraksic of anoraks, think they're the life and soul of the party, but not Martin. He wasn't into self-delusion. He knew he was a bit of wet blanket.

Story by: **Iain Grant**

He had a number of personality defects. Chief amongst these was the absence of anything very much in the way of a personality. He had *traits*, he had characteristics, he had habits and mannerisms. He even had one or two features, but none of them were features of interest. Most of the characteristics which showed in public were the sorts of things that tended to put people off. One or two of them were mildly repellent, though, again, not in an interesting way. All of them were disadvantages, socially. It made speaking to people very, very difficult.

He was very shy. Painfully so. He had a stammer and, whilst he was well aware that this was not his fault, he was painfully embarrassed about it. To say that he was physically unprepossessing would have been to be kind to him. His skin condition didn't help, nor did the fact that he had been unable to find a cure for the halitosis which had been affecting him since puberty. He had only two topics of conversation: television programmes and processed cheese. His principal pastime was watching TV, but he couldn't talk about it in an interesting way because he couldn't relate it to what, for other people, passes for real life. His only other interest, and his only source of income, was his position as quality control operative in a dairy processing plant. This, at the best of times, is of limited interest to persons outwith the dairy industry. It is not a topic with which to fascinate girls at parties, but it was Martin's whole world.

There are people who are entities, and there are people who are not. Martin, who if you'd bothered to ask him would have said that he was a realist, was quite convinced of which category he fell into. All the more surprising, then, that Martin's story is, in a quiet way, a success story.

Martin had a saving grace. Martin had discovered that, when he wrote things down, he could express strange thoughts which he would never have thought of expressing, or been able to express, in speech. It started when he wrote the word 'meaningless' on his batch quality report one Tuesday afternoon. He was never questioned about it, so he did it again, choosing the word 'terror' at random. The words just sort of popped into his head without his knowing how or why. Soon it was whole sentences. He was particularly pleased with 'the sands of time shift slowly they say but mine stay where they are.'

It came to be a habit, and for several months it gave him some sort of, though he would never have been able to explain it to you like this, creative expression. He soon realised, though, that it was a lonely thing to do. No-one had questioned him, which meant that no-one was reading the batch reports which is, after all, only natural. This is why, some five and a half years ago, he started writing to a series of penpals. In terms of social interaction it was not much for a healthy 31-year old, but it was something.

His first penpal was Alan from Devon, a man who had written to *Dairy Processing Today* complaining that the Devonian industry was being eroded by the triple horrors of industry apathy, government interference and Brussels bureaucracy. Alan from Devon's letter had concluded by asking for impressions from other parts of the country. Martin had written to him, saying the situation in Scotland was pretty much the same as in Devon oh and had he seen the new series of Dr Finlay on Friday night, and Alan from Devon had written back thanking him for his letter, particularly as he had been the only person who'd bothered to reply, and for his views on the industry which pretty much confirmed his already bleak outlook. It had been the start of a beautiful, if distant and strangely narrow, friendship. Letters were exchanged on a monthly basis, for five months, views on Euro-regulation of the dairy industry were aired, and a bond was formed.

A year or so later, Martin realised that if he had done this once, he could do it again. He began to browse other trade journals in the hope of coming across a letter similar to Alan from Devon's. Fifteen months after this first social foray he found one on the letters page of *Milk Marketing Weekly*, this time from a man called Cuthbert in a place near Newcastle. Cuthbert said that the new system for milk marketing was putting his

livelihood as a dairy retailer at risk, and he was sure that this situation was not solely confined to Northumbria and perhaps other people would care to reply confirming this impression? Martin wrote to him saying that although the situation in Scotland was slightly different because of the way milk was marketed here, it was at least as bad as it was in Northumberland, what with the government and the EU, and oh by the way had he seen that re-run of The Sweeney on Friday? Cuthbert wrote back to him thanking him for his letter, particularly as he had been the only person who had bothered to reply, and for his pessimistic views on the milk industry.

Martin realised that he had scored a major success here, and made something of a breakthrough. He hadn't known a thing about the marketing of milk beyond what he had read in that one issue of *MMW*, as it called itself, but it hadn't mattered. Someone had responded to him, and had expressed a degree of warmth and even affection. He was on to something.

The next year saw him taking out subscriptions to *Farmer's Forum* (the forum for farmers, *Agriculture Research* ('AR', the journal for the AR professional), *Tractor Times* and, in a moment of wild impetuosity, *The Plumber*. It was the last of these which proved to be the most fertile ground for the seeds of Martin's social life. No fewer than three plumbers, over the course of the year, wrote to the letters page asking for other people's views on the state of the trade in other parts of the country. One asked about the impact of the new safety regulations for the installation of gas-fired central heating because it had been terrible in Pinner, he could tell you. Another moaned about the availability of DIY fittings from Texas Homecare and B&Q, which was wrecking the trade in Wrexham, and the third Martin didn't even understand because it was either too technical or just plain gibberish (he couldn't tell). It did, though, like the others, conclude by asking readers in other parts of the country what their experiences were.

Martin wrote to each of them, a bland, uniform letter complaining about The Regulations, whatever they were, and the terrible state of the trade in the North East of Scotland, and asking whether the recipients happened to have seen, respectively, the start of the new series of Big Break, the murder scene in Brookside and the South Bank Show special on Michael Barrymore. He had three replies.

He now had more friends than he had ever had before. He started to feel slightly better about himself. He said hello to one or two people at work, in a shy, nervous sort of way, not expecting an answer. It was a start, though. He was making headway.

Two years after writing that first letter, Martin realised that he had an imagination. He'd been using it. He'd pretended to know about milk marketing, and he'd pretended to be a plumber, and if pretending isn't imagining, he didn't know what was. He also realised that if he had an imagination he could imagine himself some interesting characteristics and put them in letters to people.

He took out many, many more subscriptions to magazines with small circulations - these were, he'd found, far likelier to contain letters soliciting responses than larger organs. He bought *The Cabinetmaker, The Baker, Shopfitting International, Airport Security, The Scaffolder, Kitchen Design* and its sister title *The Bathroom*. He bought *Car Trader's Weekly, The Spreadsheet, Knitwear Manufacturing News, The Cable* (The magazine for the cable installer), *The Stonemason, Blueprint, Printer's Weekly, The UK Press Gazette, The Bookseller* (the organ of the book trade) and, by mistake, *The Glider*. He'd read the title as Gilder, seen the picture of the young lady on the front and bought it thinking it was an esoteric publication for people who put gold leaf on picture frames. When he got it home he discovered that it was actually an esoteric publication for people interested in unpowered flight but that it had a letters page anyway and that it contained no fewer than three letters from people who wanted to hear from other people about one thing or another. He wrote to one of them claiming to be a micro-lite pilot (though he didn't actually know what a micro-lite was, having simply read the term in the magazine) and got a very friendly response the next week.

It was another breakthrough. He realised that he didn't have to stick to trade publications. He could cast his net far wider. He rushed out and bought *The Angler, The Scouter, The Climber and Caver,* all of which looked highly promising. He replied to a letter in *Fantasy Gamer,* stringing together a load of mumbo-jumbo he'd found in the magazine and claiming to be a goblin. Dave in Leeds wrote back two days later saying that Martin was the first goblin he'd ever heard from, and that if Martin was ever in Leeds he shouldn't hesitate to get in touch and they could cast a few spells.

Reading *The Rambler* led him on to *Conservancy,* the magazine for people whose concern is the countryside, and he realised, halfway through reading it, that he was now entering the field of politics, Dangerous new ground, but judging by the quality of the letters page, really quite promising.

His most striking success was a result of his purchase of *Alba*, the journal of Scottish Nationalism. He wrote seven letters to people whose addresses were given on the letters page, one of whom, (inexplicably, he thought) lived in America, and got five replies. The fifth had a US stamp on it. John in New Orleans would, he said, be real interested to hear from Martin again as he was real interested in Scotland and thought that Scotland should be independent from Britain just like the States and that he really admired you guys who are fighting for independence because his Grandmother had been Scotch.

Martin was very excited. He started composing a reply straight away. He worked very hard on the letter and, in an attempt to make himself seem interesting, introduced some characteristics he thought would appeal to John. He hinted at his prominence in an underground political organisation which was dedicated to the furtherance of the Scottish nationalist cause. The organisation, he said, was very powerful and was poised to do something big. He didn't go into much detail partly because he thought it would betray his lack of knowledge, and partly because he couldn't think of any. He described his social life as a bit of a whirl, not that he had that much time for it (which gave his girlfriends cause for complaint) because of the politics and the painting. He hadn't sold any pictures yet, but there was a big dealer from London coming soon to see him.

He realised, just before he posted the letter off, that there was a flaw in what he'd said - why would someone who was so busy spend time writing to strangers in the USA? He thought for hours and came up with a reason. To make contacts. He put this in the letter.

John wrote back within the week. He was all agog about the politics, and came right out and said that he was real excited when he read Martin's letter because he was wondering whether, because Martin had been so mysterious, was he some sort of terrorist like out of the IRA, and said that if he came to the States he could be real famous and meet lots of real interesting people. He also said that he'd passed on Martin's name and address to a couple of people he happened to know who he thought might be real interested to make his acquaintance. He could expect letters from them soon. He finished his letter by saying that he hoped Martin would find time to write as he was looking forward to receiving his next letter. He signed it, 'your friend, John'.

This was a major success. A real friend.

Two weeks later a letter came from Jean-Luc in Canada. Ottawa, to be precise, though Jean-Luc was originally from Montreal. Jean-Luc worked for the Canadian Department of Defence, and said he'd been very interested by what his penpal John had told him about Martin. Jean-Luc also had political interests. The French part of Canada was dominated by English speakers just like Scotland was being run by the English, and it was interesting to make contact with a fellow freedom fighter from another part of the world. Jean-Luc said that he would be passing Martin's name and address on to certain friends of his,

friends whom Martin might find it very useful to make contact with in the near future. Friends who might be able to help. Jean-Luc's friends, Jean-Luc said, would also be Martin's friends.

This was great. Martin was now making friends without even trying.

Soon the letters were pouring in. Within six months he found he had several friends in French Canada, a few in Brittany, and upwards of twenty in Ireland. Letters were coming from the Carribean, from Latin America, from Lappland and the Basque country. They spoke, often incomprehensibly, of deals, of plots, of subterfuge, of campaigns, of stores of equipment, of a desire to overthrow the oppressor and, looking back on it later, Martin realised that that was probably why the men came.

There were fourteen of them and they had guns and they came to the cheese factory during teabreak on Wednesday afternoon when it was Martin's turn to oversee the machines whilst everybody else went off for a brew and a biscuit and they surrounded him and shouted 'Martin McMaster, you are surrounded, give yourself up. Lie down on the floor with your hands behind your head and you will not be harmed.' They were pointing their guns at him and he was so bemused that he didn't know what to do. Then he heard one of the men shout 'Go' and five of them rushed at him and Martin saw one of them swing the butt of his rifle at his head and it all went black.

He came to as he was being dragged to his feet, and he was aware of one of the men kicking him in the stomach but it didn't hurt. They dragged him off the shopfloor and out into the carpark and he saw his colleagues standing round in a circle staring at him open mouthed in astonishment as the men shoved him roughly into the back of a car and whisked him off at high speed.

Of course, they had to let him go. He hadn't really done anything wrong, and it was only five days before the men, and the other men who worked with them, realised they had made some sort of mistake. They even apologised, sort of, as they let him go, and they drove him back home in a police car.

Martin never wrote any more letters. He felt a bit chastened by the whole experience, and knew that he'd over-reached himself. Besides, he didn't really need to. Since the incident, people had started talking to him. It started with that girl Julie who'd looked at his bruises and asked whether they hurt and could she get him a cup of tea. He'd accepted and they talked for a while about what had happened to him and she said it was the most exciting thing that had ever happened to anyone she'd ever known and Martin felt a bit baffled but said yes, maybe, aye. It was a bit like that TV programme, he said. You know, the one that was on last Friday. What was it called? Can't remember. Anyway, yes, very exciting.

PUENTE

A Bridge to Art and Literature,
A Bridge to Different Cultures
A Broad Sheet to be Preserved

SUBSCRIBE

to the first two issues for Just £5

Send a Cheque made out to Puente to:

10 Parkside Terrace 2FL
Edinburgh EH16 EBL
Tel/Fax: (0131) 667-0930

El Ojo Maldito

After the hurricane
market stalls are bare.
the boy with
an old man's face
offers me an iguana,
legs tied behind its tail,
as long as he is tall.
Para comer?
I ask him naively
as the lizard flicks
a searching tongue across its eye.

glossary
El ojo maldito – the accursed eye
(hence a name given to the hurricane)
Para comer? – For eating?

Poems by: Alexander Hepburn

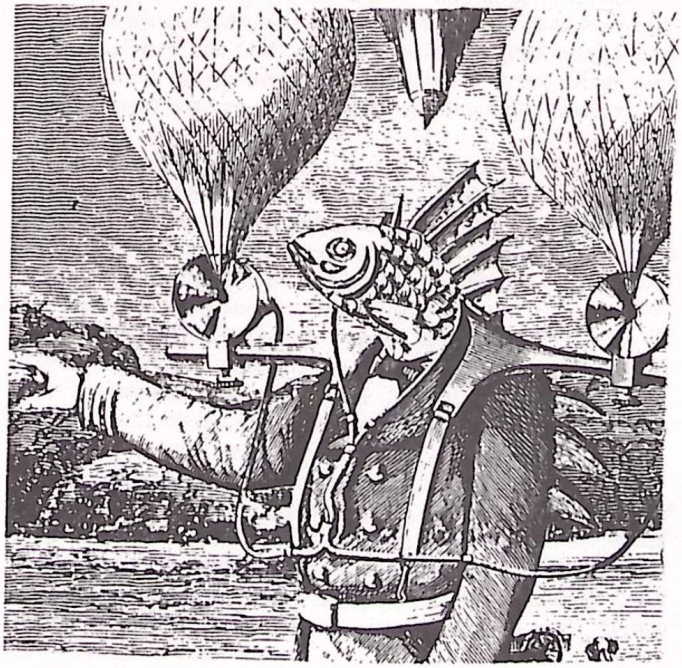
Night

The creaking of night
cooling corrugated tin
and the rooftop rumbles
under the feet of lizards.

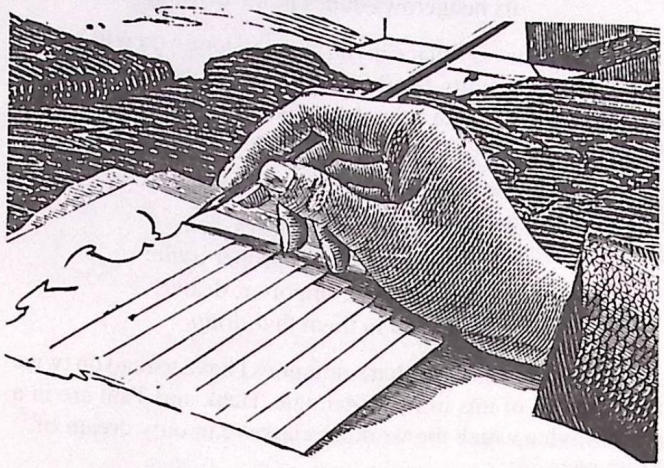
I cannot sleep
in this strange bed.
But lie awake
listening.

Heat and a bare
mattress.
Naked and the chirrup
of insects.

This morning I squashed
a scorpion
with a mophead
at three paces.



Reviews



THE WOMAN WITH TWO VAGINAS
(Poetry based on Inuit mythology and folklore)
by Denise Duhamel
published by Salmon Run Press
P.O. Box 231081
Anchorage
Alaska 99523-1081
$9.95 paperback ISBN 0-9634000-6-1
Reviewed by Brian Whittingham

Denise Duhamel originally submitted a few poems, (one titled My Grandmother Is My Husband) two of which we subsequently published in issue 18 of West Coast. The next thing I know, the collection pops through the letter box with recommendations such as *"In wildly feminist adaptations of Eskimo myths, Duhamel explores issues of gender identity and sexuality in poems so basic to human psychology and anatomy that readers cannot help but be returned to their own wild and basic urges"* and *"Duhamel's poems confront the universal themes of marriage, sexual intercourse, childbirth, violations of taboos, mutilations... etc."* which makes one think ... o.k. this blurb has grabbed my attention, but never mind the blurb, let's read the real thing and see if the content lives up to all this palaver. The result? ... All the palaver is ticketyboo.

I must say at the outset, however, that there are moments I don't fully understand, being a lad and not fully into all the womanish references and also being unfamiliar with the underlying mythical references, etc. However, rather than trying to deconstruct every single layer and hidden message, one should go with the proverbial flow and enjoy the richness of language and the strength of the images. commencing with titles that are inviting doorways to the content of poems that have such a fresh and unusual narrative style. The main ingredient that strikes me is the powerful imagery presented to the reader via direct simple language complemented by surreal characters who weave a colourful fabric.

The collection is segmented into 5 sections:
1) HIM-WHOSE-PENIS-NEVER-SLEPT
2) EVERY TABOO IS HOLY
3) TERROR IN THE ENTRANCE WAY
4) THE WOMAN WITH TWO VAGINAS
5) THE HALF-PEOPLE

What do I mean about direct language complemented by surreal characters? Well ... from the first section ... witness *Him-Whose-Penis-Never-Slept* with the story of an over amorous male (does this situation sound familiar to anyone? .. Hmmmmm) where the more the husband rubbed inside his wife, her vagina eventually disappeared as did her whole being until the final lines *Him-Whose-Penis-Never-Slept ejaculated into his wife's shadow. / It vanished, his semen a liquid ghost dripping down a lonely snow wall.* (The title reminded me of Jeff Torrington's "Swing Hammer Swing" where the central character gave the name-tag of MacDougall to **his** penis [after the self-raising flour] - obviously a universal phenomenon whether it be the Gorbals or Alaska).

From the second section The Putting Away Of Dolls, a poem where the reader is introduced to a young woman growing into adulthood with a simple yet potent opening. *This is what they called the day / her first blood came, the day she was too old / for her long slender doll made of reindeer bone.* A poem that continues to hold the reader's interest throughout culminating in *Her dolls' outfits were perfect as her mother / packed them away. The sticky blood, / slow and strange between her legs, She grew / dizzy as her family began to talk / of husbands and babies. She was an animal / strung upside down, drained before drying. / Her hands never to touch skins that small again.* As in much of Duhamel's other work, there are many other things going on in this piece.

The collection is always rich in humour as portrayed in Four Wives from the third section. In the poem we are told the story of a murderer. *This murderer of wives thought he had an excuse. / On the day he was born, his father was killed / by a group of evil spirits who drilled holes in his knees / and sucked out all his juices. This murderer's mother / vowed to make her son strong, pulling on his knuckles.* This man goes on to have 3 wives that he disposes of for various reasons. The last victim? *This seemed to be the love of the murderer's life / until he realized she was barren. Fed up, he threw her / into the sea. The rest of the village was furious. / For this was not a place where killing women was acceptable.* And what sentence did the village deem appropriate? *As punishment, the murderer had to marry / a woman no one else would take. /* And why would no one else take this woman? *She never said a word. She knew nothing of mending / sealskin boots. Her eyes were covered by a dull glaze. / She didn't have any stories to tell./* Maybe our judicial system could introduce such punishment here. I know readers (male and female) will be muttering (what does he mean? "could introduce!"). That kind of feeling when you read her work, highlights a major plus in Duhamel's poetry. Even though the vehicle used is specific regarding the Inuit mythology and feminist adaptation, the poems are universally accessible and the situations are immediately identifiable. I also feel so long as the reader does not take the situations too literally in the context of images and gender then the work can be fully appreciated.

The mythology content produces some wonderful lines that could be Dali paintings in text. From the fourth section, the poem The Woman With Two Vaginas ... *He wished // that he didn't know what he then knew - / that his sexy young wife was also a ghost. / This was no time for sentimental lust - // a ghost can only bring loneliness to a snow hut. / So he strapped his wife into his kayak / and deposited her on an ice-floe far from home.* The woman in question had a vagina on the palm of each hand.

There are may analogies that can be drawn from Duhamel's work as in a poem from the final section The Glutton where the story unfolds of a man who ate and ate and ate resulting in his

belly growing larger all the time. *The smart belly always followed him, / an embarrassment. It was time for magic. / He commanded a mountain to be his new belly. / He walked away unencumbered, proud / that he had the biggest detachable stomach of all / where he could store all the more food.* I wonder what country this tale could represent?

Well, this West of Scotland lad finds that every time he reads these poems there are more and more questions popping into his head, more and more images popping into his mind, and best of all, a smile that continually resurfaces, which I can assure you is a major happening for this reader.

In Duhamel's work there are simple words used with shocking directness (as one critic puts it) and sensuous feeling, building complex images that exemplify all that is good in contemporary poetry. To do this collection justice in this short space is impossible as there is so much going on but what better testament could there be than to know that once you have read and re-read The Woman With Two Vaginas you will find it is a collection that will stick in your mind with a vivid clarity for the rest of your days, of that I can assure you. I would not normally delve into the pot of clichés, but in this instance I would urge you rush down to your newsagents and order a copy now. (Seriously, obtain a copy of this book and your poetry collection - and yourself - will be all the richer for doing so.)

TROLLEYTOWN
Gordon Wardman,
DOG
32b Brakespears Road,
London SE4 1UW
42Pages £3.95
Reviewed by Bobby Christie

If I was middle class or a New Labour fucker, I would more and likely call Wardman, a poet who writes in a modern cut-up prose style, who has the cheek to pass it off as true poetry but as I'm not what I will say is Gordon Wardman has given us a very contemporary fiction poem. He also has a fine ear for modern voice rhythms and that the content of his work is as hard as any jazz, rap attack from the inner cities.

From page 3:

back to bedrock

The tide's dark bone
twitching in the skull
of the beast that craves
fresh territory
to fuck over

Trolleytown is everywhere, around the old cities, old class systems; these are places the old middle classes join hands with New Labour. Trolleytown is Orwell's past and David Lynch's present. The poet takes us down into this money run new-town with his two lad, heros, Tam and Hank.

From page 10:

Hank's got a franchise for distributing free newspapers
Tam's going to night-classes in basic Cantonese,
Tam's got his eye on a chip shop

From page 17:

Hank's breathing a cumulative lethargy
corrosive as rape's jaundiced acres,
looking out on a victimised landscape
blasted into green desert,
its hedgerows dunes in the drifting drought

Trolleytown is a place if you stay too long you will be lost to the old community family forever; now there's no society, now we are just human animals out for all we can get and a little bit more.

From page 20:

if I have one regret, muses Tam,
it's that I never had a proper trade;
I mean, chemist, importer, dealer,
there's gold in them thar drugs

Wardman hits hard, that sometimes I have to read on twice to take in all of this irony ridden tale. Hank and Tam are in a game of vice which the working classes can only dream of.
From page 28:

I don't care what's on the community channel
or what the neighbourhood committee's planning,
I want bearpits and brothels
and a season ticket for nine-ball pool;
wake me up when the circus comes to town

There's a lot going on in these 42 pages, from false gods to false ideals. If you like your wit as sharp as a knife then this is for you, if you happen to be middle class or have just joined New Labour, this may feel like a knife in the back; either way go on send away for this collection as Gordon Wardman is no way middle of the road but riding high on this one.

THE LIZARD SILENCE
Brian Johnstone
Scottish Cultural Press £4.95

NORTH EAST PASSAGE
Tom Bryan
Scottish Cultural Press £4.95
Reviewed by A.M. Forster

The Lizard Silence is Brian Johnstone's first collection. Johnstone is well-known as a photographer, as well as a poet, and much of this collection explores visual images in tight, meticulously-crafted and haunting poems. The poet's view of the relationship between poetry and photography is articulated in 'Bill's Eye', for William Carols Williams:

"a synchronicity
of time
and place

that now
by courtesy
of print and book

hangs on the page
a photograph
he took"

And in 'Fred's Eye', for the American photographer Alfred Stieglitz:

"a man
a wayside tree
a verse in black and white
this poem which
you sometime wrote
in light"

The book is divided into three sections. The first is concerned with nature and the landscape. Johnstone's landscape is a harsh one, full of dead crows, gutted deer and death-dealing cats. It is a landscape where there is a price to be paid. In 'In Remembrance':

"our wrists drew red in lines and dots
for this is my blood, its cost"

Lines like these have echoes of R.S. Thomas, but these are not bleak poems. Rather, they are the work of an intelligent observer with a fascination for, and a deep love of, the world around him, as well as a passion for language. In 'Crows on St Andrew's Day':

"Wind buffeted, the crows sway
in their tree top world,
a caw-caw of conversation
as the old gossips
set the place to rights
putting the evil eye on anyone
who doesn't see beak to beak."

This comes over well in four short poems in Scots, but these need to be read in their entirety.

Johnstone has a strong sense of rhythm. He also experiments with the visual appearance of poems, a number of them moving the eye across the page to convey movement in the poem. In 'Meltwater':

"the ice flaps on
shears
like crystal
chitters
like a flock
of tiny birds
migrates
downstream"

The second section features more human concerns, with poems of observation and memory that many readers will relate to. They move from childhood to moving house, goodbyes, loneliness and the realisation of similarities between the poet and his father.

There are some very fine images here that stay with the reader long after the poems are put aside. In 'Changing Shores', a friend leaving home gives the poet some keepsakes:

"and you dashed with them
through a borrowed storm,
tropical rain stotting
on northern streets,
your shirt's silk
blotched with the patterns
of another continent,
arms heaped with goodbyes."

The line-breaks and stanza-shapes in these poems never feel forced. In some of them, Johnstone uses free-rhyme which, rather than dominating the poem, creates resonances in both sound and meaning. This works to particularly good effect in 'Outward Bound'.

In 'Improvement', Johnstone piles up the visual images in a filmic way:

"Perched, we stabbed on the paint
while newspapers mosaiced the floor.
The ladders stalked about the room.
Gathering, advancing in storm clouds,
colour swept the walls away."

Johnstone's observations are tender and compassionate. In "Were the Day Clear", he movingly describes a land-locked fisherman, who would:

" ... gaze with seal eyes
to where he would place the horizon
were the day clear."

The final section of the book contains poems set in the Greek Islands. These are not mere tourist snaps, but a genuine attempt to come to terms with another culture with a huge weight of history, and to understand "the lizard silence" ('Deep Mani') In 'Water from the Well':

"A can on a rope; I let it fall,
a minute in the void
till it rises brim full of echoes,
the knowledge
of its passage in the stone.

'Wisdom, *Sophia*', the priest had intoned,
late at the year's end.
We take the water and drink,
chill from the rock,
cool and clear, like understanding."

Ultimately, though, the poet must succumb to the sheer strangeness of another place. In "On the South Coast of Crete":

"Sounds mingle in the listless breath of noon.
Olive stones round my plate
measure out the moods
I can't articulate."

There is much to be savoured in this collection. These are resonant and sensitive poems from a poet who knows his craft.

The attempt to come to terms with a new place is the major theme of *North East Passage,* written during Canadian-born Tom Bryan's tenure as Writer-in-Residence for Banff and Buchan District Council. Three of the four sections are concerned with evoking the character, landscape and history of North-East Scotland.

The first section, 'High Streets and Low', consists of eight poems, each summing up a town or landmark that the poet encountered. The second section, 'October Roads', develops some of the themes in the first, containing a variety of North-Eastern observations. Like Johnstone's rural landscape, Bryan's North-East is a harsh one; cold, grey, wet. It is a landscape where, in 'Neil Paterson (1915-1995)':

> "Small Scottish boys
> climb slippery seawalls,
> and graze their dreams
> on granite."

As with Johnstone, however, a warmth and love of the place shines through these poems. In 'Macduff':

> "Banff is the favoured older sister.
> We see it everywhere:
> Glasgow/Edinburgh
> Rotterdam/Amsterdam.
> Do not be fooled:
> what you see is not all there is."

In 'Sunset Song, Revisited':

> "It is still a rich human silage (and slurry too)
> Rain clouds yet darken the howe.
> And Gibbon, listen
> peesies still sing
> to the sea."

Much of this collection, too, is very photographic, with keen and original observation. In 'North East Hill Farm':

> "Wind-bevelled trees dovetail
> to a sludge cloud frontier.
> Dust-familiar outbuildings
> fade to stony outcrop,
> mortgaged only to wind and rain."

Bryan's style, however, is sparser than Johnstone's. Bryan, in his acknowledgements, describes this collection as "a diary, almost", and much of it is very like notes, but they become poetry through a sharp sense of sound and a playfulness with language. In 'Montcoffer Sequence':

> "2) Big house dwarfed by birdsong.
> A song bigger than a house?
> Easy.
> Peesie.
> Listen to the lapwing."

Observation enhanced by sound- and word-play is a hallmark of this collection. There is much alliteration and both internal- and end-rhyme. Bryan is clearly a keen blues fan, and this fuels some of his poems. In 'Peterhead":

> "Woke up this morning
> and every morning, waking up
> to blues spewed like sea-sickness
> on dark, slow-rolling blue."

Exile is a theme of major interest to Bryan, and he deals with this in a compassionate and moving way. Particularly effective is the rich metaphor of 'Dead Sperm Whales, Cruden Bay'. Whales are washed up on a foreign shore:

> "Terra incognita to flickering brains
> fallen off the edge of known oceans."

The exile theme is continued in the third section, 'Sonnets of Steerage', to some extent, with nine potted biographies of historical figures from the North-East who became famous (or infamous) overseas. A brief note to each poem gives the basic facts, and the poems bounce along in Bryan's spartan, playful style. He adapts the sonnet form to suit his purpose, using a traditional rhyme scheme but varying line-length. These are the stories of eccentrics and dreamers, and there are many moving moments. Quoting from these poems would not do them justice, but this series is a highly effective way to evoke the spirit of a geographical region.

The final section, 'Other Maps', widens the theme of this collection from the North-East. It also contains a few longer poems. Particularly interesting is 'The Forest Hut', a prose-poem "based on anonymous tenth century poem in Irish". This is a very well-crafted piece with some vivid description and tight rythmic control that perfectly enhances the meaning.

> "My walls and ceilings sing. Listen. Living wood grows;
> growth itself is a song. Larch hums, ash crackles, the
> hollow
> elder makes fine flutes;"

The collection ends strongly, summing itself up, with 'Borderline':

> "Death defines what life blurs,
> when we all leap clear of borders,
> boundless, free."

Not all the poems in *North East Passage* worked for me. Some of the poems detract from the strong visual imagery by the later use of more abstract lines. In 'Turriff', after the lovely "Sweet treacly coffee and a crumbling scone", the line "cold steel words' seems rather vague to me.

In 'Peterhead Prison', the idea of prisoners at a writing group:

> "Reborn as a bird of the air,
> a freestyle fish, a faraway foghorn
> on a ship, Africa-bound."

I found just too ... sentimental, and I felt a more vivid image of what they were actually *doing* would have better-communicated an interesting idea.

Still, there is plenty of interest in this book, and though I feel *The Lizard Silence* is a more even collection, at its best *North East Passage* is a moving book with some delightful observation and word-play.

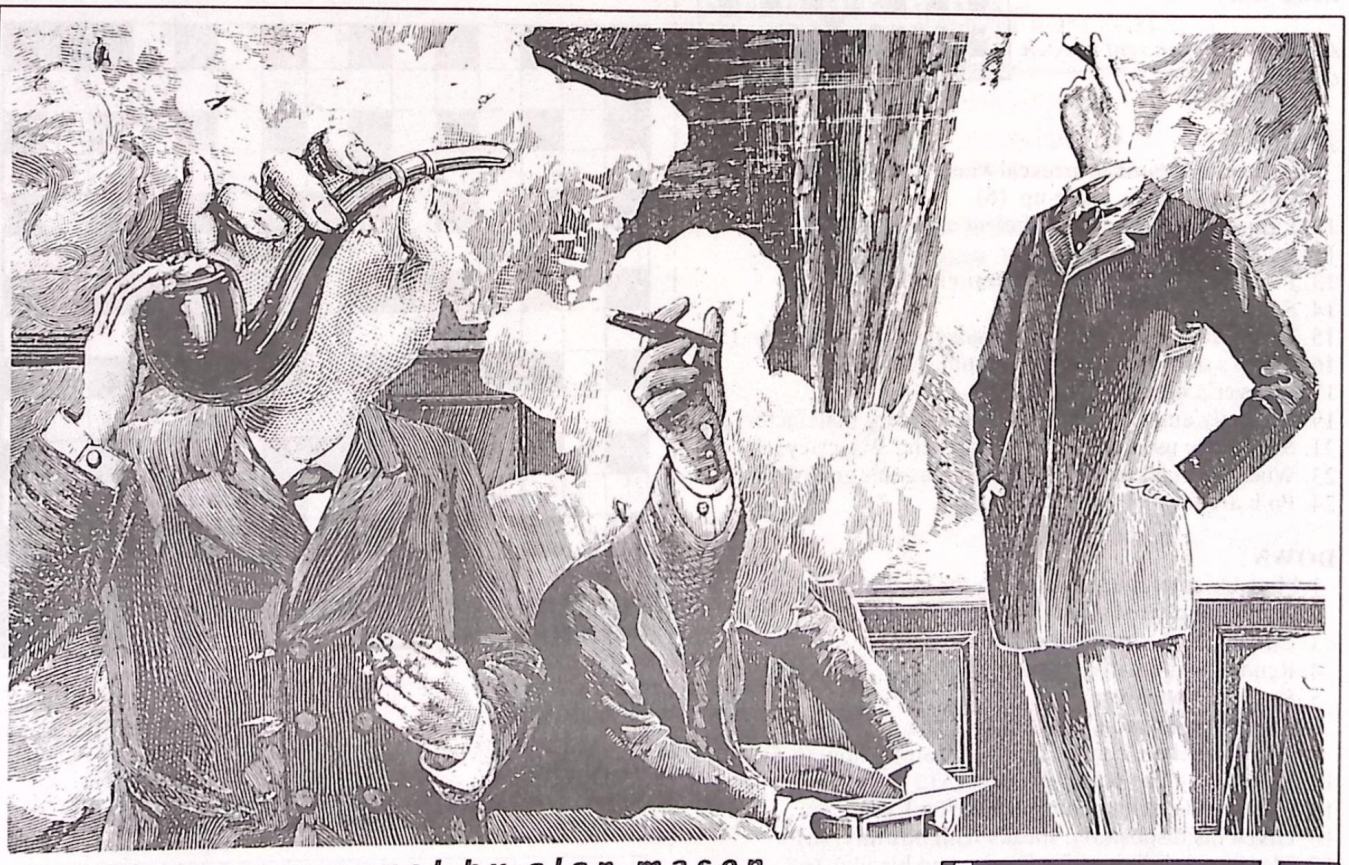
A final point. The Scottish Cultural Press is to be commended for the publication, at an affordable price, of this series, showcasing many of Scotland's newer writers. As Geoff Cooper, in *West Coast Magazine* (issue 21) indicated, however, the drab uniformity of the covers really does not do justice to the rich variety of the contents. Despite this, both these books are well worth your time.

KEYED IN TO YOUR PUBLISHING NEEDS

EM-DEE PRODUCTIONS

The Best in Book and Magazine Production

Contact Jan on 0141 204 0017 for more information,
or write to her at:
EM-DEE Productions,
15 Hope Street, Glasgow G2 6AB



melodrama • a novel by alan mason

from January 1997

taranis

Prize draw EVERY Issue for West Coast Magazine Subscribers

BOOKS * BOOK TOKENS*FREE SUBSCRIPTIONS

WEST COAST MAGAZINE
SUBSCRIPTIONS
15 HOPE STREET
GLASGOW G2 6AB

WEST COAST MAGAZINE

Name:_____

Address:_____

_____

Post Code:_____ Tel:_____

No Subs:_____ From Issue:_____

Amount enclosed: £
NB No cash to be sent in the post

Date:_____ (please date the form)

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

UK/EIRE	**£10**
OVERSEAS	**£15 sterling £20 other**
SPECIAL RATE	**£6 Unwaged/Low waged (proof required)**
SPECIAL OFFER	**£15 for 8 issues UK only (ends 31/12/96)**

SUBSCRIBE NOW!

DON'T MISS AN ISSUE

Answers to issue 23 Xword

WINNERS:

Paul Bently,
35 Kersland St.
Glasgow

A Binnie,
5 Church Gdns,
Longniddry

A £10 book token sent to each of them.

ROBERT'S TOKEEP
A R E P U R O
DREAMS FOOTBALL
I A A E T S T Y
CATRIONA THRONG
A H N G P I O
LAIR TORRINGTON
N E R E E A
McGONAGALL SNAG
A Q E A S N R
REDRUM STOPPAGE
X E I T E H H C
INFORMAL GEMINI
S O E L R L A
THETRICK BERLIN

ACROSS

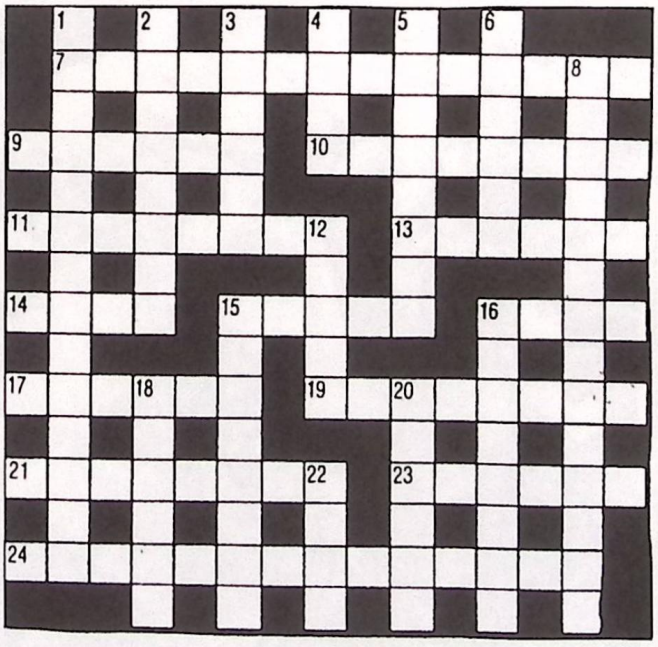
7. Desperate tries made to reveal where Jean Webb lived. (8,6)
9. Layers of a tart's make-up. (6)
10. Last warning in seven turbulent early nights. (8)
11. Red Bill's keepsake. (8)
13. I confuse ranger's sidekick entirely. (2,4)
14. See 1 dn.
15. Vessel following directions leads to B-squad quarry. (5)
16. Team's out for 13th of this month. (4)
17. Weaver's base. (6)
19. Clumsily aim C.V. at first young missing malefactor. (8)
21. Sam's tree used to build Talisman and Waverley. (8)
23. Where six hundred died needlessly in a crime gone wrong. (6)
24. Folk are fond o' yon tales. (6,4,4)

DOWN

1,14ac. Oriental roughnecks? On the contrary. (9,2,3,4)
2. At Paris I plotted sleuth's later occupation. (8)
3. Gaitens, D.A. drew out given name. (6)
4. Rendell's alternative wine supplier. (4)
5. Star often one over the eight. (8)
6. Titian's awkward characteristics. (6)
8. When Ivanhoe launched year of insurrection. (8,6).
12. Mad king given grand domain. (5)
15. Kept on the boil by me and Ms. Reid. (8)
16. Given his disposition, speaks with hostility. (8)
18. Member's skill used for Davies and his like. (6)
20. Endrick bard's spaniel. (6)
22. Chancer upset bigwigs. (4)

THE WEST COAST XWORD

£10 book token for the first correct entry received before 1st February '97. Answers in issue 25



NAME:_____

ADDRESS:_____

_____

POST CODE:_____

WHO Wrote the Book of LOVE?

we just did.

A *Friends & Lovers* astrological profile shows you what's in the stars for your relationship. This is a personal report written just for the two of you. Using your birth dates, we'll calculate your personal horoscopes with computer precision, then we'll carefully compare them. You get a sixteen page report with a counseling astrologer's insight into what's happening between you astrologically.

- How do each of you approach relationships in general?
- Is it easy for you to become close?
- What do you each look for in love?
- Which parts of either personality help or hinder a relationship, and how are they revealed in the birth chart?

the AstroFactor

For details on this and other astrological charts phone Jan on 0141 204 0017

friends & lovers

After exploring these questions for both of you, the report goes on to see how your two charts interconnect to form this unique relationship. How will you two get along? What role does each play here? When interpreted by an experienced astrologer, birth horoscopes provide fascinating clues to the inner dynamics of your relationship. These reports are very personal and specific; some people even find them a bit too accurate—a little too close for comfort. *Friends & Lovers* tells you things even your best friend can't!

MYTHIC HORSE PRESS

a measure

a new collection of poetry

by Gerry Loose

£3.95 post free

SUBSCRIPTION ONLY

You can't buy this anywhere else!

Order your copy now
cheques made payable to:
Mythic Horse Press

available from Em-Dee Productions
Top floor, 15 Hope Street, Glasgow G2 6AB
NB Mythic Horse Press does not accept unsolicited manuscripts

CHAPMAN

Scotland's Quality Literary Magazine

"Literary magazines don't get better than this!"

George Mackay Brown Interviewed
Malcolm Lobban on Taming the Scots
New stories and poems from GMB

New Poetry from:
Kevin Williamson
Vallerie Thornton
Kevin MacNeil
Sam Gilliland
and Eveline Pye

New Fiction by:
Stanley Robertson
Raymond Soltysek
Marion Arnott
Laura Hird
and Henryk Skwar

Available September 1996

Chapman New Writing Series

George Gunn *Whins*
Gordon Meade *The Scrimshaw Sailor*
Tom Bryan *Wolfwind*
Margaret Fulton Cook *Good Girls Don't Cry*
Janet Paisley *Alien Crop*

Available now in all good bookshops or directly from:
Chapman, 4 Broughton Place, Edinburgh, EH1 3RX
Tel: 0131 557 2207 Fax: 0131 556 9565

Chapman 84: George Mackay Brown

OUT NOW!

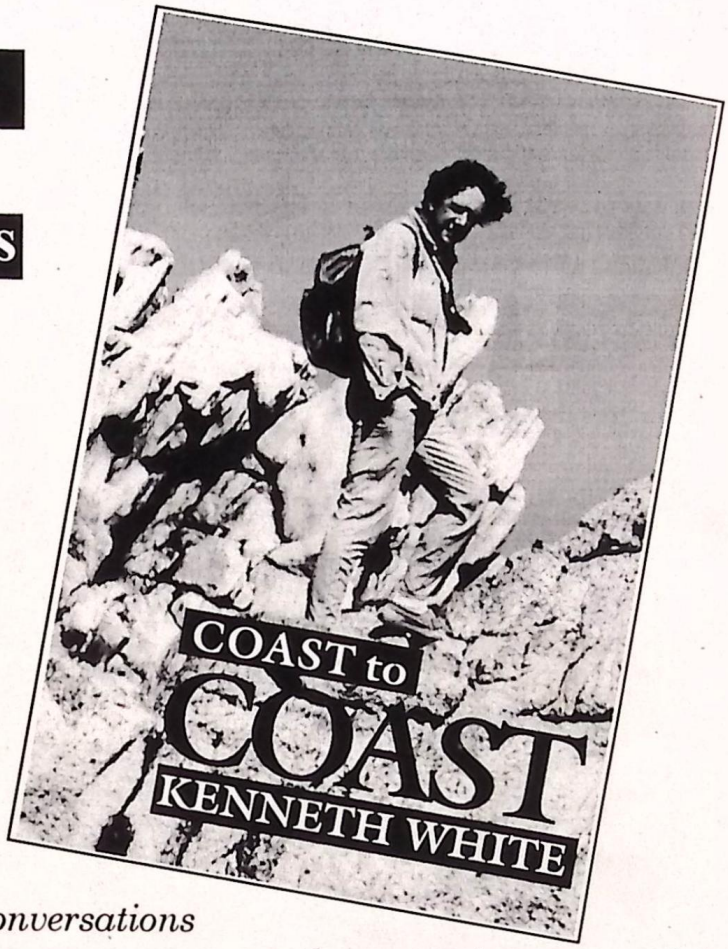
Open World

in association with

Mythic Horse Press

Present:

COAST to COAST
by KENNETH WHITE



Consisting of various interviews and conversations between 1985 and 1996, this book goes some way towards answering many of the questions inherent in Kenneth White's work. It gives the first comprehensive insight published in English into the new field his work represents.

Published 16th November 1996 128pages priced £7.95 post free

Please send me _____ Copy(ies) of Kenneth White: Coast to Coast @ £7.95ea post free.
Please make cheques payable to Open World Poetics.

NAME:_____ Cheque/PO Number:_____

ADDRESS:_____

_____

CITY:_____ POST CODE:_____

Return order forms to: Norman Bissell, 340 Lincoln Ave, Glasgow G13 3LP
*** NB Mythic Horse Press and Open World CANNOT ACCEPT UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS!**